



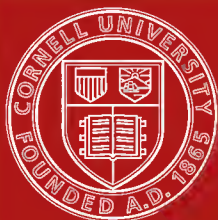
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ON TEN PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE



ON TEN  
PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

BY

STOPFORD A. BROOKE



*SIXTH IMPRESSION*

LONDON  
CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.

1919



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# I

## MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

*Midsummer Night's Dream* belongs, probably, to the winter of 1595, and was made, it has been said, to celebrate a marriage. This may well be so; it has a bridal atmosphere. Though the affairs of love are fantastically tangled in it and their music jangled, even in fairyland, yet in the end the tangle is resolved, and the marriage-bells are tuneful.

It is a comedy of love. About four years before, in 1591, Shakespeare had written a tragedy of love in *Romeo and Juliet*. To begin this book with the earlier play would have been more historical, but not wiser. *Romeo and Juliet* is the kind of love-tragedy a young man writes in order to dramatise his pleasure with some imagined sorrow. Shakespeare did not write it out of any personal gloom or any deep knowledge of the trouble of the world. It was written to try his eager and happy hand at tragedy; and a youthful exuberance frequently emerges through its sorrows. Few things are more different than the tragic spirit in *Romeo and Juliet*, which was in the story but not in Shakespeare, and the tragic spirit in *Lear* and *Othello*, which was in himself and then embodied in the tragedies. The real Shakespeare at this time was full to the brim with the joyous spirit of youth. And *Midsummer Night's Dream* represents the actual temper of his soul far more truly than *Romeo and Juliet*. I have therefore chosen to begin with it.

Delight in life; pleasure in himself, and in mankind;

sympathy with brightness more than with sorrow; an enkindling happiness; were, in spite of his tragedies, the very root of Shakespeare. Having power and love and a sound mind, he could, naturally, play with human life; nor did his power to do this prevent his sympathy with its pain, or dim the clear eyes with which he saw its miseries. On the contrary, he owed to the deep-seated joyfulness in him the sanity of his judgment of life, the unbiassed justice with which he weighed its good and evil in the balance, the clear sight he had of physical and moral evil. It is the cheerful poet who sees the gloom most lucidly, most wisely.

When grimness or sulks at life get down to the centre of a man, they disease his judgment, weaken his intelligence, dim his sight, disenable his feeling; and, if he be an artist, enfeeble his grip of his subject, disperse his concentration, deprive him of that creative apartness from his materials which enables him to use them as he pleases for the making of a new thing. He loses, that is, the divine command of his genius, not only over the comedy of life, but also over its tragedy. Deeply as Shakespeare felt the woe, wickedness, and weakness of humanity, he was still their master. If he was in them, he was also beyond them, and in this twofold relation to them lay his artistic mastery of tragedy. It was the same with Sophocles, and it is this which makes him greater than Euripides. This power to stand outside as well as inside of human sorrow belonged to Shakespeare, because at the deepest root of him was, I repeat, delight in life; even rapture—the word is not too strong—with the playfulness of its spring and the fulness of its summer.

*Midsummer Night's Dream* is Shakespeare at lyric play with human life; and also with the beautiful life of the natural world. As such, it represents the constant, even the dominant, spirit of Shakespeare's nature more truly



than his tragedies. These were written at a time when his natural gaiety was overwhelmed either by personal trouble, or by a transient cynicism, or by the pressure of some deep conviction of the sorrow and sins of the world. He saw, he even touched, it seems, in that hot and eager world, the darkest depths of grief and crime, of weakness, dishonour, of tyrannic passions, and deadly mistake. None have seen them more profoundly, but even in their blackest gloom he created a certain brightness. Comedy, sometimes kindly, sometimes bitter, even cynical, glides in amidst the tragedy; he can still disport himself a little. As the years brought him comfort, he passed out of the darkness into clear light. His ineradicable pleasure in humanity, the sweetness and delight of it, survived its woes and terrors; and the latest plays abide in the clear atmosphere and lovely colour of a gentle, bright, and peaceful sunset. They have their still philosophy, their wise even solemn experience, their melodious forgiveness, their mystic touch on life and death—grave and dignified elements which his passage through the tragedies of mankind had left in his soul. But that passage through the valley of the shadow of death had not destroyed but confirmed his bright sanity, his sweet sympathy with the love and ardour of youth, and his happiness as he looked round on the world. He had become quiet, but his quietude was gay and tender. He still retained the power to play graciously with human life. He still loved Nature and played with her. Ariel, the lively spirit of the air, is as charming as Oberon and Titania, the spirits of the moonlit earth. Caliban is as good an image of the dark coarseness of Nature as Puck is of its mockery of us. The natural description in *Winter's Tale* is even more imaginatively felt than that in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The love of Miranda is more delicate than that of Juliet; the loving of Florizel and

Perdita is as impassioned, though rarely so outspoken, as that of Romeo and Juliet, nor is the love of Rosalind and Orlando more simple, happy, and chivalrous. And the playfulness of his latest work is not less, though it is different. There is even a delightful roguishness, full of odd wisdom, in a character like Autolycus, which is better and nearer to humanity than the mirth of the clowns in the earlier plays with whom we might compare him.

Thus, the central brightness, the sportive happiness at the root of Shakespeare's character and art lasted when he had emerged from tragedy. Therefore, though *Romeo and Juliet* preceded the *Dream*, I have begun with the *Dream*. It belongs to the earliest, to the most enduring element in the soul of Shakespeare.

Certain elements of the play harmonise with the time at which it was written, a time in which the poetic properties and interests of the past were recovered for the imagination, in which new poetic materials were discovered. England, after a long drought, had again felt the freshness of the dew of Romance, and heard the soft falling of its rain. The imagination of the people, re-awakened, urged them into the passionate life of discovery, of adventure, of intellectual pursuit of the unknown. And in Spenser's hands, and here in Shakespeare, all the living creatures of the woodland and the waters in whom Romance had delighted, returned to enliven Nature and to take their kindly interest in humanity. The Nature-spirit in French, Anglo-Norman, and Celtic romance rose again; and Shakespeare, born into it and rejoicing in it, made a new world for its new form. Among remnants of romantic tales like *Huon of Bordeaux*, and among the folk-traditions of the people, he found the dry bones of Titania, Oberon, and Robin Goodfellow, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. It was a great thing to perfect the form of the rediscovered fairyland; and b

did it with such mastery that the fairies have never died. Even modern science, with all its own wonders, has not driven them out of the field, nor does it wish to banish them. It has evolved a science out of them, and not spoilt them. Yet, living as he made them, Shakespeare, with his luminous sanity, makes them creatures of a dream.

Along with this revival of romance, there was the recovery of the classics. This was the work of the Renaissance, in the English youth of which great movement Shakespeare was born. Its energy, repressed by the bigotry of the reigns of Edward VI. and Mary, broke into a rapid and fertilising stream when Elizabeth was well seated on the throne. It was not long before Greece and Rome wielded over intellectual and imaginative life as great, perhaps even a greater dominion than romance; and men like Shakespeare, who were not scholars, enjoyed the stimulation of the classic writers and of the history of the great doings and men of the past in the host of translations which lay on every bookstall. Among these was *Plutarch's Lives*, and the first of them is the life of Theseus. It crept into Shakespeare's imagination, and one of its incidents supplied him with the framework of this play. The subject fell in thus with one of the literary fashions of the day, so fashionable that even the working classes in the towns were interested in classical stories. They saw them in a hundred pageants, and it is quite Elizabethan that weavers, joiners, bellows-makers and the rest, should choose the story of Pyramus and Thisbe for their rude representation.

Moreover, the classical movement at this time was not altogether apart from the romantic. The legendary in the life of Theseus slipped easily into the world of romance and into the stories of fairyland. A kind of amalgamation took place, such as had happened before in

the romantic cycles of Troy and Alexander. There is the strangest mingling in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, of Greece and Faërie, of the survivals of romance and the impulses of the Renaissance. The mediæval fairies meet to celebrate and bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. It is hinted that Oberon was the lover of Hippolyta, and that Titania, herself in love with Theseus, was jealous of his amours with Ægle, Antiope, and Ariadne. History has no chronology, and time scarcely seems to exist in this imaginative world. Even the new names of the shepherds and shepherdesses in the Elizabethan pastoral are introduced. Oberon takes the shape of Corin, and verses love to amorous Phyllida. Such a lively mixture is the play.

These literary tendencies of the day—the classical, the romantic, the pastoral—are used by Shakespeare exactly as a young poet of genius, without scholarship, would use them. But the Euphuist element, so conspicuous in *Love's Labour's Lost*, is scarcely here. Shakespeare had all but got rid of it, and we meet it no more in his work.

Another element in the play is also new, at least in form. Mixed up with the heroic personages and the fairies, with the classical and the romantic, are the 'rude mechanic patches,' whose doings form a piece of real life. Shakespeare has got down to the working men of the lanes and courts of Elizabethan London. It is true they are supposed to be Athenians, but they were drawn from the life. And, indeed, I suspect they were not far from a true picture of the Athenian working man, so curiously does Shakespeare's piercing genius enable him to represent not the particular but the universal characteristics of any class of men with whom he deals. None of those who meet in Quince's house say anything which might not have been said by an Athenian as well as by an Elizabethan working man at a time when, literature being

the vogue, fragments of culture would filter down to the uneducated classes and be travestied by them. These poor folk are vitally interested in their play. They are inventive of means, properties, and suggestive pageantry. They believe in all they do. And they never step out of their own atmosphere. This is a piece of realism, and it opened an old vein in English literature in a new way. It is said that Shakespeare did not care for the common folk. He did not think them fit to govern, but he had a true sympathy for them, an affectionate intimacy with their manners, their humour, and their views of life. And his new realism of the poor has never ceased to be a living element in English literature. It began with Langland and Chaucer. It died away. It rose again in Shakespeare and the dramatists. Ever since then it has ebbed and flowed, and to-day it is stronger than ever in fiction and in poetry.

Another element in the play was purely of Shakespeare's time, and of his own youth. It was the prominence of love. The age was the age of love-poetry. Even the imaginative prose was concerned with love as its chief subject. But the poets were immersed in it. They made books of sonnets on this passion, and were then called amourists. Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Watson, and many others echoed one another in this form of literature. Moreover, in the resurrection of national joy and honour, in the new confidence England had in herself, she was young again, and of course she sang of love. It is the subject of youth. And Shakespeare, himself young, and having the buoyant joy of genius in its exercise, turned to love as the prominent element in his dramas when they became quite original; and *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, even the *Merchant of Venice* (though that play is of a larger dramatic scope), show with what variety

in his earlier period he treated the affairs of love. Nor did he cease to treat them even when the history of his country claimed his interest, or when tragedy laid her grave hand upon his shoulder. As to the latest plays, they are full of the tender loveliness of youthful and married love.

This play, written for a marriage, is, naturally, concerned with love. Theseus and Hippolyta image the sober love of middle age, with here and there a touch of passion. They have no difficulties, no trouble. The tragedies of love, except those arising from jealousy, belong, for the most part, to youth and the beginnings of old age. In middle age the great outside interests of the world modify into quiet that tyrannic passion. Theseus turns at once from Hippolyta to the business of the state. Hippolyta can philosophise with ease on the vagaries of love. And both, not caring for the loneliness with one another which youthful love desires, are delighted with the pleasures of the chase. They rise early in the morning to follow the hounds. Their talk is not of love, but of bygone hunting, of their dogs, their breed, their musical cry.

With the young lovers it is different. Love, as he is in Spenser's mask of Cupid, is a cruel, capricious god to them. Even Puck disapproves of his conduct—

Cupid is a knavish lad,  
Thus to make poor females mad.

Lysander loves Hermia, and Demetrius Helena. But Demetrius forsakes Helena for Hermia, and hence are born jealousies, furies, quarrels, dissolutions of friendship, death or a convent to Hermia. Under love's cruel driving, Helena betrays Lysander and Hermia to Demetrius, and is a traitor to honour. Under it the friendship of Helena and Hermia is dissolved, and Demetrius and Lysander seek each the other's death. Love sets them

into madness and confusion. Then with a sudden turn, in the midst of the dream-night, Shakespeare turns to laugh at the folly of youthful love. He makes it depend on the juice of an herb, as if it were only a chance, as if it lay only in the eye. Lysander hates the woman he loved, Demetrius loves the woman he hated. Helena and Hermia are driven wild with pain. Titania herself is a victim, and falls in love with Bottom crowned with an ass's head. All is mockery of Love as the maddener, the god of unreason. Only Elizabeth escapes, 'the fair vestal throned by the West.' She is 'fancy free,' and this isolation of her makes the compliment Shakespeare paid her almost as exquisite as the poetry in which it is made. Finally, the play, the rude mechanics' play, is a love-tragedy as deep as that of *Romeo and Juliet*. But it is turned into laughter, and makes the sorrows of love the tragical mirth of an hour. The note of all this treatment of the subject of love is struck in the first act by Lysander's phrase

The course of true love never did run smooth,

then by Lysander's statements of the crosses of love, then by Hermia's answers, and then by the soliloquy of Helena at the end of the first scene. Nothing can be more characteristic of the time, of its literary life, of the mastery of love as a subject, of Shakespeare's sportive youthfulness, than this hither and thither of love in various fantasies. 'Nowadays,' says Bottom, 'reason and love keep little company together.'

Then there is the scenery. We have no descriptive hints as to what Shakespeare expected the audience to see in Athens with the 'intellectual eye.' It is quite different with regard to the wood where the fairies are. This is not deliberately described, but by scattered touches, in the midst of the dramatic interest, Shakespeare

suggests its landscape, and we, for ourselves, create it. That is his way of natural description; it is the way of genius. We have walked through this wood again and again, and know many of its recesses. We even know its outskirts, for we have companied with Theseus and Hippolyta when they came to its edge to hunt in the morning. There lies the western valley enlivened with the Spartan hounds and foresters, and there climbs the mountain-top which overlooks the valley and the wood, lit with the 'yellow gold' of the morning which Oberon 'oft made sport with.' The wood is full of flowers; faint primrose beds, cowslips, oxlips, wild thyme, musk-roses, eglantine, honeysuckle; of hawthorn-brakes and briars, barky elms, great oak-trees, dewy glades, wild undergrowth; and the moon shines brightly over it. The to-and-fro of the wandering lovers, of the roving fairies brings us, time after time, into, we imagine, every dell and clearing of it.

This was the landscape, and there was not a groundling in the pit who did not see it more clearly than we see it in the elaborate decoration of our stage. We are held down to the scene-painter's sight of it, and that limits our self-creativity. But every one in Shakespeare's theatre made from the poet's suggestions his own wood out of his own memories of the country. In such a wood Shakespeare may often have wandered on the outskirts of the London of his day, but he saw it through eyes which had looked with the delight of a youth on the woods round Stratford; and Charlecote's memories enter into this wood near Athens, and into the forest of *As You Like It*.

It is easy from this play to see how keen was his enjoyment of Nature, and with what an observant eye he watched her doings. Nor was his eye less keen for the animal life in the wood. The squirrels racing up the trees,



the ox stretching his neck to the yoke, the crows fattened with the murrion flock, the snake with enamelled skin, the rere-mice with leathern wing, the owl that wonders at the quaint spirits of the fairies, the hedgehogs, spiders, beetles,

The ousel-cock, so black of hue,  
With orange-tawny bill,  
The throstle with his note so true,  
The wren with little quill ;  
The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,  
The plain-song cuckoo gray,

the lark so tunable to the shepherd's ear, the wild geese the creeping fowler eyes, the russet-pated choughs, who,

Rising and cawing at the gun's report,  
Sever themselves, and madly sweep the sky ;

the red-hipped humble-bee, the fiery glow-worm's eyes, the painted butterflies,<sup>1</sup> are seen as clearly as Browning saw them, and with the same eye for their colour. To the poetic observer of beasts and birds, colour is their first distinction. Then he sees the other marks which isolate them from one another, and then the points in which each species is excellent. Shakespeare's eye, trained in the country, knew the fine points of animals as clearly as he knew those of men and women. In *Venus and Adonis* every point of excellence in a horse is mentioned. The description of the hare, 'poor Wat, far off upon a hill,' who

Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,

is as true and vigorous ; but neither of these is finer than that of the dogs in this play—

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,  
So flew'd, so sanded ; and their heads are hung  
With ears that sweep away the morning dew ;  
Crook-knee'd, and dew-lapp'd like Thessalian bulls ;  
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,  
Each under each.

It is like a picture by Velasquez.

<sup>1</sup> All these descriptive phrases are taken from the play, and so are the flowers and trees mentioned above.

The form of the play is simple. The first act and the last are of the waking day, of real life. (In the midst is the night, and the fanciful life of a dream. And added to this vivid contrast is the episode of the comic tragedy of Pyramus, which, in a certain sense, combines the real and the imaginative life—for the working men of Athens are lifted above their daily toil into an ideal world by their rude aspiration to art-creation. Their play knits by its object, which is to do honour to Theseus' marriage, the last act to the first. Finally the marriage of all the lovers is accomplished, and the fairies bless the marriage-bed in lovely poetry.)

Theseus and Hippolyta are children of the day, of clear reason, and practical life. Hippolyta is the sensible woman of high rank, with all the natural freedom of a great lady, living and thinking in the open air. Fond of the chase, she remembers with pleasure how the skies, the fountains, seemed all one mutual cry when she bayed the bear with Hercules and Cadmus,—an Amazon as well as a great lady. She is interested in the story of the night. It is 'strange and admirable,' and 'grows to something of great constancy.' But she reasons on it clearly. Her curiosity does not carry away her good sense. Theseus and she discuss the events of the dream, and the several views of the man and the woman are admirably distinguished. (She has little patience with folly and ignorance, and is greatly bored with Pyramus and Thisbe. 'This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard,' she says, with her plain intelligence. Theseus sees more deeply. 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.' But Hippolyta answers quickly. 'It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.' Not for a moment is this Queen asleep, or fanciful, or in a dream. Yet, though a warrior Queen, she does not want a woman's gentleness—)

I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,  
And duty in his service perishing.

When she hears Bottom mourning over Thisbe, her sympathy is awakened, even though the stuff is silly. 'Beshrew my heart,' she cries, 'but I pity the man.'

Theseus is as plainly a King in the daylight. He is in love, but his love has no fantasy. Night, he believes, is the fairies' time, but he spends it in love or in sleep. He turns in a moment from Hippolyta to the business of government, more important to him than love. His deep respect for Athenian law and precedent, his moderation and firmness in judgment, his support, even though he pities Hermia, of paternal authority, all mark the man of the world and the statesman; the lucid reasoner, who has never been in the land of dreams. He does not believe the story of the Night. These matters do not belong to cool reason, but to the seething brains of lovers or madmen. The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact.

Yet, in that famous passage, he can describe the poet and his work better than most, so clear is his sight of things. He sees imagination's work in the acting of the poor mechanics, and therefore sympathises with them, as is fit for a ruler of men. Nor could Shakespeare's noblest men speak with more of a royal nature than Theseus does when he reasons on the homage offered to kings. Hippolyta has objected to the play being heard. It is not kind to these poor folk, for they can do nothing in this way, to hear them. 'The kinder we,' says Theseus,

to give them thanks for nothing.  
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake ;  
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect  
Takes it in might, not merit.  
Where I have come, great clerks have purposed  
To greet me with premeditated welcomes ;

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,  
 Make periods in the midst of sentences,  
 Throttle their practis'd accent in their fears,  
 And, in conclusion, dumbly have broke off,  
 Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,  
 Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome ;  
 And in the modesty of fearful duty  
 I read as much as from the rattling tongue  
 Of saucy and audacious eloquence.  
 Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity  
 In least speak most, to my capacity.

This is the good manners of a gentleman. It is as wise in experience as it is courteous in feeling, clear in reasoning. To the last—and not least when he tells the players, 'Never excuse, let your epilogue alone'—he is of the bright-eyed morning; no king of shadows like Oberon, never in a dream.

Nor are the minor characters in the first act less of daylight reality. Egeus, a hateful father, is a plain-spoken tyrant. Hermia, when she lays her case before Theseus, is very different from Hermia in the dream. Her modest good sense, seated in her faithfulness, does not say much before the King, but what she says is steadfast and clear. Theseus says, 'Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.' 'So is Lysander,' she replies. 'In himself he is,' answers Theseus,

But, in this kind, wanting your father's voice,  
 The other must be held the worthier.

HER. I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

She is admirable in all the rest of the scene: reverent to Theseus, even to her father, but fixed as fate in her fidelity to her lover, wide awake to the events, and of a keen intelligence.

The same luminous daylight shines over the second scene, in Quince's house, where the mechanics order their play. These two scenes in the court and the cottage, so close to real life, Shakespeare took pains to make unlike

a dream. It is only when the lovers are left alone that imagination enters, and the talk becomes poetry. Then love's high fantastic possesses all they say like a spirit. Hermia tells Lysander that she will meet him in the wood: a simple statement, but this is how she words it—

My good Lysander !

I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,  
 By his best arrow with the golden head,  
 By the simplicity of Venus' doves,  
 By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,  
 And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen,  
 When the false Trojan under sail was seen,  
 By all the vows that ever men hath broke,—  
 In number more than ever women spoke—  
 In that same place thou hast appointed me,  
 To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

This is the way love and youth heighten—'*To be sure I'll come*'—into poetry. It is followed by that fanciful game with words between Lysander and Hermia concerning the troubles of love. Some have called it unnatural. On the contrary, this tossing to and fro of fancies in play is quite natural to lovers when they are young. Then, since the love of natural beauty is akin to human love, the lovers lift into poetry all they say about Nature. For them Phœbe beholds

Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,  
 Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,—

For them the primrose beds are faint where Hermia and Helena were wont to lie.

In this uplifting air of love they are no more of the noonday, but of the twilight, half-way to the moonlight of the midsummer night, on the skirts of the dream. Shakespeare was a master of gradation. The dream-note of the next three acts is thus struck, yet it only sounds dimly, like a far-off bell. As yet, the fancy of the lovers has none of the unreason of a dream. Their speech is

clear, their minds awake. But the atmosphere they breathe is one that easily changes into dream.

They sleep, and another day goes by. Then comes the Night, the magical midsummer Night, and with it the fairy world. The lovers seek the wood, and so do the crew of mechanics to rehearse their play. And they pass into the dream. The daylight has gone; the moonlight rules. Indeed, the moon is the sky-mistress of the play. She is not only the Queen of the Midsummer Night; she is the goddess of the marriage-bed of Theseus and Hippolyta, whose first speeches dwell on her. The lovers talk of her beauty. Oberon and Titania live in her light and breathe its air. Pyramus and Thisbe meet in moonshine. The fairies bless Theseus' bed in her brightness. All the sentiment of moonlight in a million lovers' hearts pervades the play.

Shakespeare has, with easy power, brought into these three acts the mystery, the fantasy, the dimness, and the unreason of dreamland. Titania and Oberon resemble the stately, graceful creations of our imagination when we are asleep. The fairies who attend the Queen are like those unfinished, childish fancies, begun and broken off, which we see in dreams. Puck is the representative of the grotesque, unmoral, unhuman creations (for fancy, without will, has no conscience, no humanity) which so strangely go and come in dreams. Then, the changes of scene, the appearance and disappearance of the personages, cross and recross one another with the bewildering rapidity of a dream. We are even borne away in a moment to vast distances, for dreams have no geography, and the fairies move as swift as thought through space. Oberon comes from the furthest steep of India. Titania sits with her friend in the spiced Indian air, watching the ships go by. The quarrel is about an Indian boy. The introduction of India (ε

country on which the English then spent a world of fancies) adds its own mystery to the dream-atmosphere in which the reader moves.

Then, too, there is in the wood the confusion, disorder, and unreason of a dream. The lovers fall in and out of love with one another for no cause in the world but the mistakes of a mad spirit, who is himself the plaguing grotesque of a dream. And time and periods of thought are also huddled into confusion. Theseus and Elizabeth are living together; romance and the classic world jostle one another. Hippolyta has been Oberon's mistress; Titania the cause why Theseus betrayed Ariadne.

We may add to this the wild grotesquerie often characteristic of dreams. The ass's head placed on Bottom's thick skull; the elemental Queen embracing the clown; the contrast between the lovely delicacy of Titania's language and the clownish wit of Bottom; the way in which he employs the dainty fairies; his own unthinking acceptance of the new world into which he has come—the most fantastic of Shakespeare's dream-imaginings—are all of a fine grotesque. Puck is its image, that 'lob of spirits.' He tells of his practical jokes with humanity, of his good nature when it is his humour. He does no fatal mischief, but he is quite out of sympathy with the sorrows of mankind. The jangling of the lovers amuses him, though it wins the pity of Oberon, the higher spirit. It is he who, in the grotesque of the dream, places the ass's head on Bottom and hurries the coarse mechanic into the fine-spun life of fairyland. The dream reaches its height when the Queen of Dreamland herself is set dreaming. Even dreams dream that they dream; and Titania cries—

My Oberon! what visions have I seen!  
Methought I was enamour'd of an ass.

As to the lovers in the dream, it is a mad business.

The men change their sweethearts without asking themselves why they change. It is different with the women. So far as love is concerned, they are steadfast throughout to what they were outside the magic wood, and I believe that Shakespeare meant to make that difference. He had the strongest belief, as a dramatic artist, in the constancy of women. He has only drawn one inconstant woman in all his plays. Here the affections of Helena and Hermia for their lovers are quite uninfluenced by the magic of the wood, nor do they understand change in love. Helena, even when Demetrius begins to love her, thinks he is mocking her. She cannot comprehend his alteration, even though it is what she most desires. Then, Hermia cannot conceive that Lysander should cease to love her—

I'll believe as soon

This whole earth may be bor'd, and that the moon  
 May through the centre creep, and so displease  
 Her brother's noontide with the Antipodes.

A splendid audacious hyperbole! Even when Lysander calls her 'Ethiop,' 'cat,' 'burr,' 'tawny Tartar,' she does not believe him. The dream atmosphere has no power over the love of the women, but it masters that of the men. Reason or unreason—in Shakespeare—are equally powerless to affect a woman's love.

In other matters, in this realm of dream where neither will nor reason reigns, where natural humanity is let loose unchecked by social custom or duty, the women do change as well as the men. Helena's wooing of Demetrius becomes more impassioned, less womanly. Maiden reserve all but perishes. Hermia's educated quietude and modesty of tone vanish away. Her natural fierceness, which has been subdued to courtesy, breaks out in this dreamland. 'Out, dog! out, cur!' she cries to Demetrius, and Demetrius fears her fierce vein and



ceases to follow her. The men have lost all courtesy, gone back to uncivilised nature. Their language is unbridled, such as we use in dreams when the will is undirected by conscience or good manners. All this comes to a height at the end of the third act. The old and loving friendship of Helena and Hermia is shattered. Helena recalls it only to deny it. Hermia, not as yet convinced that Lysander loves Helena, is amazed at the heat of Helena. But when she is convinced, when Lysander tells her he hates her and loves Helena, the latent fierceness of her nature, fanned into fury by her love, breaks out against Helena—

O me ! you juggler ! you canker-blossom !  
 You thief of love ! What ! have you come by night  
 And stol'n my love's heart from him ?

Mockery follows after mockery, jealousy after jealousy; they attack one another like two women in the market. Then Lysander and Demetrius, stung into wrath by the atmosphere the fierceness of the women has made them breathe, fly also at one another's throats. It is all of the unreason of a dream. The men and women are not themselves. Their extraordinary rudeness or shrewishness does not belong to their waking characters.<sup>1</sup>

I may say, in passing, that the whole act is an excellent piece of stage-management. Reading it, it seems con-

<sup>1</sup> That is, to their characters as formed and modified by education and social habits. I cannot say whether Shakespeare intended to say that in the atmosphere of the dream they lost those habits and reverted to their natural uncultured characters; but if, as is probable, he did not mean that, he writes as if he did—at least, so far as regards the women, who have more need to conceal themselves than men. When Helena and Hermia meet at last in the wood, and jealousy takes a hand in the game, both of them are quite different from their aspect in the first act. Hermia is no longer grave, dignified, moderate in speech. She has gone back to herself as she was at school—a hot-tempered, bold, quick-handed shrew, who terrifies Helena, and who cries, 'Let me come to her.' And Helena, who had already been a traitor, now becomes her natural cowardly self. When they wake, they revert again to their educated selves.

fused. I used to think it could not be staged. But when I saw it, I recognised that it was written by a master of stage-craft. There is not an entrance or exit in this bewildering running in and out of personages which is not accounted for, led up to and arranged for easy representation. And Bacon was about as capable of doing this as he would have been of smoking a pipe in the face of James the First.

Oberon and Titania, Puck and the fairies, have nothing of this unreason in their world or their life. They are in their own atmosphere; the men and women are not. And the creation by Shakespeare of this fairy region with its indwellers, which, while we are in it, seems wholly reasonable and real, is one of his creative triumphs. Its isolation from humanity is complete. Human nature touches us now and then in Oberon's sympathy with the lovers, in Titania's love of Theseus, in their meeting to bless the marriage-bed; but these touches only make us realise more fully that their life and thoughts are separate from ours, and, therefore, that when men and women get into the fairy realm, they are all astray. To create this impression was Shakespeare's desire, and it is wonderfully done.

The fairies have no conscience, no morality, and no constancy in love. They do what they like without a thought of anything being forbid. They are pure children of Nature, nay, they are Nature herself; embodiments of her forms, of flowers and animals; and the loftier fairies—Oberon and Titania—of her elemental powers. These are the spirits in matter, its thoughts perhaps; and they have the swiftness of thought. Puck can 'put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.' This is a long time, but then Puck did not possess full fairy powers, or elemental powers. Ariel, on the contrary, comes with a thought. Oberon can come from India to Athens in a

flash. Being invisible, they have the swiftness which is linked in tradition to invisibility, and which science allots to the invisible forces of nature. Shakespeare derived this part of his conception from old tradition, Arthurian or Irish, but he developed it by the metaphysic which, deep in his nature, was yet always suffused with poetic imagination.

The fairy realm Shakespeare created was quite different from any that had preceded it—a new creation in the world of imagination. His way of building it gave it consistency, poetry, beauty, and conscious life. He shaped its work, its pleasures, its manners, its poetic mode of speech, its love-affairs, its court, its ritual, and its unmorality. All the fairydom of the next three centuries derives from it. But its image has now degenerated. What our poetry and our child's books give us of fairyland has neither the dignity nor the lovely speech nor the reality of Shakespeare's dream. As there was nothing like it before him, so there has been nothing so good after him.

Yet, new-shaped as it was, it was made out of existing materials; partly out of the Arthurian stories, out of the fairies of the lake and the wood who loved, like Titania, mortal heroes, and who could wear the same stature and shape as those they loved; and partly out of the English folk-traditions, often rude and unpoetic, concerning elves and dwarfs and a host of little people, who helped or hindered the agriculturist and who were honoured by a blunt, primeval ritual which took different forms among different peoples. Robin Goodfellow, whom Shakespeare developed into Puck, belongs to this folk-tradition, and he has attained in the play a higher life and powers.)

These rustic traditions were the only kind of fairy belief which had a popular existence in England when Shakespeare wrote. The Elf-land of Romance was far behind his time. Even Chaucer, writing two hundred years

before him, relegates the faerie of England back to Arthur's time—

In the olde daies of the King Arthoure,  
Of which that Bretons spoken grete honoure,  
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye ;  
The elf-queen with hyr jolly companye  
Danced ful oft in many a greene mede.

Those days had passed away for Chaucer, to his regret. In Malory's book they were, however, revived for Shakespeare. It is probable also that he had read Huon de Bordeaux. He took then the fairydom of Arthurian story, which from Celtic had become romantic, and he took also the elf-folklore which still lives in rustic England, and made out of both these sources a fairyland of his own. Curious survivals from them appear in single lines, in long passages, and in certain qualities which jut forth, as it were, in Oberon, Titania, and Puck.

1. The description of Puck and his tricks (all belonging to the life of the farm), both by himself and by the fairy who talks with Puck at the beginning of the second act, is a remnant of the rude folklore of the elves of England. It does not belong to the Arthurian sources. But when Puck is developed by Shakespeare into the swift servant of Oberon, he is, though he retains his elvish mischief, lifted on to the romantic plane. He is a spirit between both the traditions—*un esprit panaché*.<sup>1</sup>

2. Oberon and Titania are linked to the elemental forces of nature. Their lives, their very temper, are echoed in the doings of the sun and moon, of the seasons, of the weather. When these two are in harmony, all is well

<sup>1</sup> I believe Puck to be a remnant, unknowingly wrought up by Shakespeare, of the tradition of the infant carried off by the fairies who, living with them, gains many of their powers, but is always tricky, half human, half fairy, and a servant to the fairy Queen or King. But Puck also refers back to the agricultural tradition. All his tricks are done to the farm-dwellers; he knows the native proverbs, and they are those of English country life (Act III. Sc. ii.).

with field and furrow, with agricultural humanity. When they quarrel, all goes wrong. That noble piece of poetry in which Titania traces the ruined year to her quarrel with Oberon proves this by its conclusion—

And this same progeny of evil comes  
From our debate, from our dissension ;  
We are their parents and original.

This conception has no source that I am aware of in the Arthurian romances. It harks back to an earlier world, to those gods and goddesses of the ancient Teutonic and Celtic mythology who were the deities of agriculture, to whom the farmer prayed, who made the weather according to their pleasure or their anger with their worshippers; and who, when Christianity destroyed their rule, continued as the 'fairy host' in Ireland under forms of high imagination; and in England as the elves and dwarfs and tricky sprites, like Robin Goodfellow, under forms made by rustic and unpoetic superstition. Yet, in whatever shape we find them, they have to do, in one part or another of their life, with the work of the field and the farm, with the natural forces which promote or injure agriculture.

The poetry of that ancient life was, no one can tell how, seized on and restored by our Magician in Oberon and Titania, who have the qualities of divine nature-beings, but on a lower level than they were before Christianity. They are invisible; they come and go as swiftly as thought. They still command the elements. They bless or ban the doings of the tillers of the ground, help or injure them. And it is characteristic of their origin that they consecrate the marriage-bed of Theseus with the dew of the field.

3. Oberon and Titania have a sympathy with, and give protection to, heroic personages, both male and female. They give more than protection; they give love.

Titania's relations to Theseus, and Oberon's to Hippolyta, are one of the survivals I have mentioned. These love-affairs between the immortal and the mortal go back for their origin not only to the Arthurian cycle of romance, but further still, to the Irish mythic stories, to Cuchullainn, Oisín, and the rest. The relations between men and the fairies had, in the Arthur tales and the heroic Irish legends, the same unmorality which prevails in the lives of Shakespeare's Oberon and Titania. He did not invent it; he derived it.

4. In connection with this, it is plain that Oberon and Titania could, like the romantic fairies and the Irish goddesses, assume the shape and stature of mortal men and women. Some say that Shakespeare's fairies are exceedingly small. And many of Titania's attendants are. They creep, for example, into acorn cups, and hang the dewdrops on the cowslip's ear. But the higher creatures, like the King and Queen, can be, we must infer, as tall, when they pleased, as the men and women they were in love with. Even Puck can assume any shape he pleases, and we may be sure that when Oberon played as Corin with amorous Phyllida, and when Titania sat with her Indian 'votress of my order' all the day to watch the ships go by, they were more than an inch in height. Even Mustard, Pease-Blossom, and the rest, when they talked with Bottom, could not have been, for the moment, exceedingly small. This power of changing shape, and of being small and great at pleasure, is shared in by Ariel.<sup>1</sup>

These and other elements were Shakespeare's materials. The combination of them into the lovely form of a new world of Faerie was the magical work of his genius. Moreover, he placed these rough jewels of thought in

<sup>1</sup> Those who wish to read more on these matters would do well to get Mr. Alfred Nutt's admirable little book on the *Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare*, to which I am much indebted.

the loveliest setting possible—in poetry not one word of which is out of harmony with the fairy atmosphere he has created. He is never more gracious, more consistent in poetry than on the lips of Oberon.

When Oberon brings into his talk 'Cupid all-armed,' whom only he could see, and the mermaid on the dolphin's back whose music drew the stars from the sky, we feel no jar of unbelief, we understand that his common speech is poetry. Nor does Titania fail in this. Her talk has the same exquisiteness; as if the flowers themselves were speaking. What they say is not the highest poetry, not of the depths of passion or thought. That great matter belongs to man. But it is of a light, airy loveliness, like the feelings and images which drift in and out of a happy child. And this is Shakespeare's undervived creation. On the lips of Oberon and Titania, it is chiefly concerned with beautiful things in nature, with flowers and birds and wild fruits of the wood, with the sea and the mountains, the moonlight and the morning. The little fairies, their attendants, belong also to what is gracious and gentle in the woods. They take care of the flowers, adorn them with the pearls of the dew, are the enemies of all gloomy and ugly things, drive them from Titania's bed, and sing to her as she sleeps. They are the spirits which dwell in beautiful things, such spirits as Shelley placed in the crystalline spheres that the sun drew upwards from the stream. This invention is also of Shakespeare alone.

Again, he made their life to belong to the moon. It is only in her light that they waken to dance and sing and rejoice. It is only at night that they are happy, and able for their pretty works. This also is Shakespeare's device. But Oberon and Titania are free, or nearly free, from this limitation. When they assume a mortal shape, they share in the day. This, however, is but seldom. Their nature is

to 'follow darkness like a dream.' They are in the shadow world. Yet even there the King has power to play with the outskirts of the dawn.

I with the morning's love have oft made sport ;  
 And, like a forester, the groves may tread,  
 Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,  
 Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,  
 Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

All this is of Shakespeare's own imagination. And it is, I repeat, a wonder of imaginative power that, throughout this fairyland, he should keep his elfin atmosphere quite untouched by humanity.

Two more things may be said. First, Oberon and Titania are quite the King and Queen. Shakespeare had a full respect for dignities, and his great people always speak with dignity and good manners. It is not different in the fairy world. Tennyson's treatment of Oberon and Titania would have jarred Shakespeare to the bone, and is sufficient to prove how much the Shakespearean ideal of Elf-land has degenerated. There is no rude scolding in the quarrel of the King and Queen, nothing undignified. Even when Titania is in love with Bottom, she never loses her greatness or her grace in speech.

I am a spirit of no common rate ;  
 The summer still doth tend upon my state.

Oberon does not get his way with her by violence or by authority, but by superior knowledge. He and she are equal in rank and honour. And when he sees her, by his trick, enamoured of an ass, he is sorry for her. He has upbraided her; she—her pride forgotten through his magic—has answered him with patience and given up the cause of their quarrel. Pity awakens in him; he releases her with loving words—

Now, my Titania ; wake you, my sweet Queen,



and Titania instantly gives back his love;

My Oberon, what visions have I seen!

This is all in the high courtly strain.

Secondly, in this shadow world, one human thing persists. It is the difference of sex. Oberon is altogether the man, Titania the woman. It is this element in them which gives them their sympathy with us, with the lovers, with the marriage of Theseus. And it is vividly present in all their words and ways. This sex-difference was vital in Shakespeare's work. No man ever said or did anything womanly in the plays; no woman in them ever spoke or acted like a man. When Rosalind, Portia, Imogen assume the man, there is a subtle, conscious difference in all they say from that which a man would say, which keeps them woman; a more delicate style in phrase and thought and play, an atmosphere of charm. To give this impression when boys acted the parts must have been difficult, but great genius rejoices in difficulty, or does not see it. The modern tendency towards the effacement of sex-difference never appears in Shakespeare. That the difference is always present is at the root of half the power he has over humanity. And here, even in the world of dream, it is as prominent in Titania and Oberon as it is in Beatrice and Benedick, in Desdemona and Othello, in every man and woman in the plays.

Of all the fantastic events of the dream not one is so fantastic as the introduction into it of Bottom, the rude mechanical, with an ass's head; and of his love-affair with Titania. Titania is still Titania, even when she is enamoured of this monster. Her speech is always poetry, her flower-like life is still mingled with the flowers. She lives in her love without a thought of human morality; and when it is over, she instantly forgets it as if it had

never been; makes no excuse for it, and takes up her life with Oberon immediately. This is quite in character with the unmorality of the Nature-Fays of the Arthurian Romance, and of the Irish goddesses. Her unconsciousness, under the spell, of her folly is charming, yet pitiful; and she has even the melancholy and the absorption of human love. Oberon paints her as wandering alone in the wood seeking for flowers to deck her love, and as forgetting everything else. Her attendant fairies never question her will, nor seem surprised at her vagary—and that too is most fantastically fantastic. Yet, audacious as it is, Shakespeare has made it seem almost natural.

Bottom takes it all quite naturally. In a moment he has been swept into the fairy world, and is loved by its Queen. He does not think he is in a dream till he gets out of it. The humorous vanity of the man not only supports him, but enables him to throw himself eagerly into the situation. He talks to the fairies as if he were one of themselves, and uses their service according to their names. So he would have talked to Quince and Snug, Flute and Starveling. In the dream he keeps his previous vanity; he has always been the king of his little world; he is still the same king in fairyland. But it is a pleasant vanity, and is founded on a real superiority. All his fellows own his greatness. No one objects when he says he can act Hercules if necessary, or take the part of Thisbe; and when he is lost, the play is given up. He has the activity of pure vanity, does all he believes he can do, and in every difficulty sets to work at once. When he recovers from the dream, he puts it aside in a moment for action. His fellows want to know where he has been. But he will not tell them now.

Not a word of me. All that I will tell you is that the Duke hath dined. Get your apparel together, good strings to your beards, new ribbons to your pumps; meet presently at the palace; every man look

over his part ; for the short and long is, our play is preferred. . . . No more words : away ! go ; away.

Even in the presence of the Duke his pushing nature makes him at ease. He is so fond of explaining everything to the lower intellects of the court, of setting every one right, that he interrupts the play for that purpose. He corrects Theseus and puts Demetrius down. Quite proud, at the end, of the success of his play, he offers Theseus an Epilogue or a Bergomask ! Yet he has the artist's belief in what he does, and great pleasure in it. Therefore, absurd as he is, Theseus and Hippolyta are quite moved by his acting—

THE. This passion and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad.

HIP. Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.

When his fellows fly from him, after his 'translation,' this same self-confidence sets him at ease with himself, and he begins to sing that they may hear he is not afraid. He is equally at ease in fairyland. Yet, he never seems to realise Titania. Had he for a moment confessed love to her, he would have lowered her in our eyes. We might have thought real what was due to magic. Nor does he believe it when he wakes. The dream, lingering with him for a moment, amazes him, and confuses his tongue.

Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.

Then he becomes fully awake.

I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream ; it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it has no bottom.

He is back almost at once in his plain, honest life.

It is different with the lovers. They are naturally at home in the world of imagination. Their dream has been so vivid that for a long time it seems reality—that well-known result of dreaming. Theseus tells them all is right

with them. They have begun to realise this, yet dream-land lingers with them. There is a world of meaning in their words.

DEM. These things seem small and undistinguishable,  
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

HER. Methinks I see these things with parted eye  
When everything seems double.

HEL. So methinks :  
And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel,  
Mine own, and not mine own.

DEM. Are you sure  
That we are awake ? It seems to me  
That yet we sleep, we dream. Do you not think  
The Duke was here, and bid us follow him ?

HER. Yea, and my father ?

HEL. And Hippolyta.

DEM. Why, then, we are awake.

The Dream is over. Hippolyta half believes it. Theseus puts it down to imagination. But the lovers know it has brought the dreams of their lives into reality.

Shakespeare himself does not disdain his Dream, nor think it only fancy. A creator loves the world he makes, and would assert its reality. And, indeed, while a great part of the events of the time when Shakespeare lived has perished from memory as unsubstantial, this creation of his has taken to itself immortal substance. The fairy-land he made lives still, not only in the play, but in its children—in a thousand books and poems, in pictures and in music. Nor did Shakespeare write as if he thought his dream altogether a dream. He has made it do actual work, as if it were not all compact of shadow. It is dreamland that has made the lovers finally happy, got round the laws of Athens, put the tyrannic and greedy father in the wrong, settled Theseus into the promoter of true love, reversed the cruel tricks of Cupid all-armed, and made every one at ease. Oberon, the King of shadows, has done it.

(And I am not sure that in the whole drift of the play

there is not a half-ironical suggestion of Shakespeare's, a transient imagination of his youth—that this life of ours is but a vision, out of which we are to wake at last; out of the disturbed, inconsequent, confused, grotesque condition of which we may pass into the ordered reality. If so, he would hint in this early play what momentarily engaged his thought when he said with Prospero—

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

The lovers rejoice that they have awaked from a dream into reality; but they do not know, as Shiva would have said, that it was but a dream within a dream, and that they are still asleep.

The fine poetry of this play is of a twofold character. It might be divided, without being too fantastical, into poetry of the daylight and of the moonlight. There is a delicate spirit, a shimmer of fancy and elfin thought, without any human feeling, in the music and the charm of the poetry Shakespeare puts into the speech of the fairies which seems made of the silver of moonlight and to bring with it the shadows of moonlight. The Indian mythology tells that moonstones in the rays of the moon distil a nectar, with the scent of camphor, which is composed of the substance of the moon and is the essence of its light. Such a moonstone is the fairy poetry of this play. It drops nectar.

Mingled with it, there is another spirit, less delicate, less fantastical, nearer to our thought—the spirit of the woodland, of the life in trees and flowers and the wild fruits of the earth, and of their beautiful indwellers. There is a weightier note in this, a touch as it were of humanity, which gives some substance to the moonlight spirit in the verse. In both, however, the ripple and melody of the

poetry are like the ripple and melody of nature, the movement of the waves of the moon's light, the rustling of the night-wind in the trees and grass. It is not fantastical to believe that Shakespeare felt this harmony of his fairy-poetry with the moonlight and the woodland. Only once in this play does the fairy-poetry lose these notes. It is when Titania describes the country desolated by rain and storm,—the result of her quarrel with Oberon. She does not care much for the miseries of men, but she *thinks* of them, and this thought of hers gives substance to the poetry of her description. A closer humanity belongs to the delightful verse of Puck and Oberon and Titania when, with their train, they fill the house of Theseus and bless the marriage-bed. A domestic charm lives from line to line, and goes with the fairy tribe from one shadowy room to another.

Through the house give glimmering light  
By the dead and drowsy fire ;

Quite otherwise is the poetry of the daylight, of the men and women who are not in the dream. It has weight of thought and feeling, and is full of the matter of human life. The first dialogue of Theseus and Hippolyta is marked by an imaginative passion which elsewhere does not appear in their words. It gathers round the moon, and the spirit of the moon has touched it. The rest of the beautiful things they say beautifully is full of that fresh good sense and that morning brightness which, as in Milton, so in Shakespeare, have so much to do with noble poetry. The speech of Theseus concerning the welcome given to kings by simple folk, his famous picture of the antique fables poets, lovers, and madmen make, are touched with that grave matter of thought and human experience without which poetry is an empty shell, full only of sweet sound. As to the rival description by

Theseus and Hippolyta, when in the dawn from the mountain-top they watch the hunt, the very breath of the fresh morning sings and cheers in every word of it.

The lovers too have their own poetry. A different note fills it, the note of youthful, inexperienced love, in its joy and its trouble, full of fast-changing fancies, none of them deep or penetrating. Even in the mad-nesses of the dream their thoughts live only on the surface of things. Passion's touch on the four lovers is slight, claps them on their shoulder, but does not close round their heart. Nature, who, when love is profound, disappears from the lover's eyes, is used by these lovers to illustrate and enhance their love. Helena, being unhappy, is she in whose mouth Shakespeare places the finest love-poetry. Her sorrow adds substance to her fancy. It is she who cries in words which sing themselves

O happy fair!

Your eyes are lode-stars! and your tongue's sweet air  
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,  
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.

It is she who describes the school-days' friendship, the childhood innocence of herself and Hermia, in a passage which, in spite of its elaborate beauty, has always seemed to me a little out of tune with the confusion and the wildness of the Dream in which she is then involved. It brings us too much into reality. But this impertinent reproach to Shakespeare is perhaps undeserved. Helena is far the most tormented of the four lovers, and the height of her misery would, in Shakespeare's mind, lift her above the magic of the dream into her natural self.

Poetry moves then through three separate worlds in this play, and moves in all with ease. But its wonders of creation are most unique, most of an unknown, unex-

perienced beauty, in the world where Oberon bids Puck  
remember how once in the moonlight he

sat upon a promontory  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
To hear the sea-maid's music.

All the magic into which Keats once entered is in the  
words and in their melody.



## II

### ROMEO AND JULIET

GOETHE, when Director of the Theatre at Weimar, put *Romeo and Juliet* upon the stage. He omitted nearly the whole of the first act, and made the play begin with the mask and dance at the house of Capulet—that is, he left out the quarrel in the street, initiated by the servants; the intervention of the Prince between the two great houses at feud; the love-pains of Romeo for Rosaline and the sketch of his character contained in them, before he is made a man; the sketch of Juliet before Love had made her woman, which, given by her mother and the Nurse, is also touched in by Juliet herself; the representation of the young bloods of Verona, overflowing with youthful sap and wit, in which Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio are contrasted and isolated into individual characters.

To leave out all this preparation, these studies for the full picture, this slow growth of the tragic storm before the Event suddenly arises which contains, inevitably, the conclusion, is to understand neither Shakespeare nor dramatic art. Over this long preparation broods the long-suffering Justice who punishes quarrels which injure the state; and Shakespeare meant us to understand this. How he meant it I shall afterwards try to explain. It is enough to say now that he suggests it in the Prologue, where he states the ground, the fatal working, and the conclusion of this his earliest tragedy.

In the first four scenes, so long and careful is his

preparation, all the elements of a coming doom are contained and shaped—the ancient feud, deepening in hatred from generation to generation, the fiery Youth-in-arms of whom Tybalt is the concentration; the intense desire of loving in Romeo, which thinks it has found its true goal in Rosaline but has not, and which, therefore, leaps into it when it is found in Juliet; the innocence of Juliet whom Love has never touched, but who is all trembling for his coming; the statesman's anger of the Prince with the quarrel of the houses; and finally, the boredom of the people, whose quiet is disturbed, with the continual interruption of their business by the rioters—

Clubs, bills, and partizans! Strike! beat them down!  
Down with the Capulets, down with the Montagues!

a cry which seems to ring through the whole play. It is impossible this should continue. Justice will settle it, or the common judgment of mankind will clear the way.

The quarrel of the houses is the cause of the tragedy, and Shakespeare develops it immediately. It begins with the servants in the street; it swells into a roar when the masters join in, when Tybalt adds to it his violent fury, when the citizens push in—till we see the whole street in multitudinous turmoil, and the old men as hot as the young;

CAP. My sword, I say! Old Montague is come,  
And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

MON. Thou villain Capulet! Hold me not, let me go.

Then, when the Prince enters, his stern blame of both parties fixes into clear form the main theme of the play. He collects together, in his indignant reproaches, the evils of the feud and the certainty of its punishment. We are again forced to feel that the over-ruling Justice which develops states will intervene.

This scene is an admirable piece of history. It brings

before us in a moment the hot passion of a mediæval town where the nobles are at feud. A servant bites his thumb at the servant of another house, and in five minutes the streets are streaming with blood. It was much the same in Italy when Shakespeare wrote; nor was such disturbance impossible in London, though Elizabeth had welded the nobles together into a common patriotism in which individual quarrels were reduced. In Edinburgh, where the clan system was stronger, the streets leaped in an instant into strife. It is worth while to read, as a parallel to this scene in Shakespeare, the vivid sketch Scott gives in *The Abbot* of the Canongate rushing instantly into crowded rage when the chiefs and retainers of the Seton meet with those of the Leslies on the crown of the causeway.

With what intensity of life both these descriptions by Scott and Shakespeare are infused! The giving of life was their pre-eminent power. Other dramatists had worked the story before Shakespeare, but the men and women were lifeless dolls. He took the crude, commonplace material, placed its elements in the crucible of his genius, and when the mixture boiled above the fire of his passion a host of living creatures, each distinct, loving, fighting, talking, in joy and sorrow, poured forth, brimming over with thought, passion, and action, and mingled together to weave the tragic story. It was much to animate the chief personages of the tale, Romeo and Juliet, till they are for ever young, for ever loving; it was more perhaps, for it was of a greater difficulty, to animate with a quick-eyed life and character the minor personages of the play. The Nurse and Mercutio are nothing in the original tale. Here they become living representatives each of a separate class.

As vivid and as distinctive a life is given to the rest, down to the very servants. None resembles the other. All

have their own ways, their own character, their own results. 'Let there be life,' said Shakespeare, and there is life.

And the life in them all is the life of youth, even in the old men. Old Capulet is as hot-headed as Tybalt, so is old Montague. The Nurse lives over her youth in luscious memory. The Friar has a gentle sympathy with young love, tastes with a gusto his youth in the love of Romeo and Juliet. The young men flash into merriment and wit and fighting with equal joy and fire. Even Benvolio's quiet is kindled into flame at a touch. Mercutio overflows with the sap of youth. There is not a leaf on the tree of his life which is not thrilling with it. The first fancy of Romeo for Rosaline, even though it is not a deep but a superficial love because it is not returned, is full of the solitudes, the fantasies, the self-brooding and thinking, the imaginative dreams of youth in love with love, of the pranks a lover's intellect plays with words in order to illustrate his love—rather than with Rosaline. Juliet is a child with a will, but subdued to her mother's hand, till the fated hour comes. Amid all this turmoil of youth, it is pleasant to touch her unconscious childhood. It soon departs, and then she is the incarnation of first love, knowing in one supreme moment all that love commands.

When the hour comes to Romeo and her, the swift 'precipitancy' of youthful ardour seizes them, and never lets them go. The sight of one another across the room is enough. The same night Romeo climbs the orchard wall, speaks with Juliet, and plans their marriage. The next morning they are married. The morning after they part for ever. It is cruel, but even Justice herself seems to have all the impetuosity of youth, and only allows her victims one night of love. Shakespeare has shaken off all the delays of the original story. In it, weeks pass

before the lovers meet. But here, youth scorns delay; 'O, let us hence;' says Romeo, 'I stand on sudden haste.' Juliet is not less wild with youth's impetuous passion. She will have her marriage in a moment—

The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse ;  
 In half an hour she promis'd to return.  
 Perchance she cannot meet him : that's not so.  
 O ! she is lame : love's heralds should be thoughts,  
 Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,  
 Driving back shadows over lowering hills :  
 Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw Love,  
 And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.  
 Now is the sun upon the highmost hill  
 Of this day's journey, and from nine to twelve  
 Is three long hours, yet she is not come.  
 Had she affections, and warm youthful blood,  
 She'd be as swift in motion as a ball ;  
 My words would bandy her to my sweet love,  
 And his to me :  
 But old folks, many feign as they were dead ;  
 Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.  
 O God ! she comes. O honey nurse ! what news ?  
 Hast thou met with him ? Send thy man away.

'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,' she cries when she waits for Romeo. The ardour of her youth and love is living in the words.

When they threaten to marry her to Paris, she will die on the moment, as when Romeo hears of her death he resolves to die instantly. Death is a slight thing to youth when the wine of life is drawn; and the lovers welcome its peace. The Friar, being old, is cautious. 'Too quick is youthful blood.' 'Wisely and slow,' he cries, 'they stumble who run fast.' 'These violent delights have violent ends.' 'Love moderately, long love doth so.' Even Juliet herself, for once, in the midst of her hurrying passion, pauses a moment. The black wing of Destiny seems to touch her coldly—

I have no joy of this contract to-night :  
 It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden ;

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
Ere one can say, it lightens.<sup>1</sup>

The play races, drawn by the steeds of youth. It even seems, I have said, as if Justice herself were in a hurry to accomplish her ends. There is an impression on the reader that she is driving with hastening lash all the characters on to the catastrophe.

In contrast with this speed, there is, at the beginning of the play, the slow dreaming of Romeo over his love for Rosaline. Had he been truly in love he had long since brought his love to a point. He is rapid enough when he is vitally touched; but now he is as quiet as a dove, brooding, cooing to himself, taking no action. Benvolio scoffs at him for this, lectures him, sketches him wandering through the grove of sycamore, flying from his friends into the covert of the wood. His father sketches him shut up all day with the windows closed against the sun; secret and close, 'his own affections' counsellor.' He loves his own phantom of love, not Rosaline; sick of himself, not sick of love; enthralled within his own personality, though, to himself, he seems to have lost it;

Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here;  
This is not Romeo, he's some other where.

He amuses himself, as no true lover does, with intellectual, not passionate, fancies concerning love. He paints it in euphuistic tricks of words—it is 'heavy lightness, serious vanity, feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health! Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!' This is dreaming of love, not loving, and the proof is he does not care for anything. The true lover cares for

<sup>1</sup> Compare Lysander's illustration in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—

Brief as the lightning in the collied night  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say, 'Behold!'  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.  
So quick bright things come to confusion.

and Shelley's - what in this world's delight -

everything. The only thing which interests Romeo now is himself, himself whom he pities, caresses, nurses, whose misery is his sweetness.

Not a trace, not a shred of this is left, when the true thing dawns, then blazes like the noonday sun; and the contrast, vividly conceived, splendidly executed, was meant by the artist. This supreme love comes like a divine revelation, shaking his estate of man to its centre, destroying the dreamer, establishing the man of action, replacing the fanciful by the actual man. He feels it before it comes; the deep shadow its brightness throws falls upon him; he hears in it the wild call of Destiny; it is one of Shakespeare's mystic passages. Before he enters Capulet's house, just before he sees Juliet, he stays in the street and names his fear.

I fear, too early ; for my mind misgives  
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels, and expire the term  
Of a despised life closed in my breast  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.  
But he, that hath the steerage of my course  
Direct my sail ! On, lusty gentlemen.

This is the dreadful gate by which he enters the paradise of love. Shakespeare never lets us forget the doom which overhangs the play.

Along with this contrast between the delays of fanciful and the swiftness of real love, there is also the contrast of the unthinking gaiety, the wild youth of Tybalt and Romeo's companions, with the dark fates which follow the star-crossed love of Romeo and Juliet. It is their love which slays Mercutio first, then Tybalt, and then the County Paris; which turns Benvolio's joyousness into sorrow, and strips old Capulet of all his youth-in-age. But before we trace their fates, it were well to touch

the characters of these youths whose brightness throws into relief the early glooms of Romeo.

Benvolio is his close friend; of a steady, still character, equally ready to win his friend out of his useless life by gentle reproof, and to quiet down the riots in the street; the type of the temperate man who lives long, and who is of use at all periods of history. The sketch Mercutio makes of him as one who is ready to quarrel for anything is plainly a mocking of his quiet and reconciling temper. He has no genius, little fancy, and is cut out for a statesman. Nor is he specially Italian. I am sure Shakespeare met this type among the young men of the court of Elizabeth, men who would grow into statesmen like Cecil.

Opposed to him in character, but his friend, is Mercutio; wit's scintillating star, thrilling with life to his fingertips, not caring for women save as the toys of an hour, ready to tackle, on the instant, any woman, young or old; brave, audacious, going swiftly to his point, keeping no thought within him but flinging it at once into speech; 'he will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month'; quick in choler, ready to attempt the moon and pull the sun down, loose of speech, mocking old and young out of the racing of his blood—the gay ruffler of Italy, such as Shakespeare often met in London, such as many of the Italian novels enclose and paint.

But he is more than that. He has wit. Whatever he touches he finds ten remote analogies for it; his wayward thinking plays with every unimportant matter, as a cat with a mouse, till the matter seem important. Nor is his wit unmanly, like that of the dainty courtiers of the day who conned their quips and cranks out of books, and whose most absurd type is Osric in *Hamlet*. It is, on the contrary, all his own, the fresh coinage of his brain. It is kindly too; while he mocks at Romeo's love he does



not despise him. Those he despises are the fools and the blusterers, like Tybalt—

The pox of such antick, lisping, affecting fantasticoes, these new tuners of accents! . . . these strange flies, these fashion-mongers, these *pardonnez moi*, who stand so much on the new form that they cannot sit at ease on the old bench.

Mercutio scorns these water-flies. He has added the sturdy sense of the Englishman to the rippling gaiety of the Italian. More than wit belongs to him. There is a touch of genius in his soul, and a single grain of that rarity makes its possessor loveable. Even in the midst of Romeo's new passion he loves Mercutio. Benvolio weeps for him—

That gallant spirit hath aspir'd the clouds.

Romeo avenges him; swept away by grief to forget for an instant his love of Juliet.

With this touch of genius is imagination, or rather fancy almost becoming imagination. Of that uncommon web of gossamer the well-known description of Queen Mab is an enchanting example. It is not quite of imagination all compact. <sup>These words are not in the original.</sup> It flits with amazing grace and lightness over the surface of the thing described; it does not penetrate it. As poetry, it is of the same quality and kind, but not so beautiful, as the speech of Oberon and Titania; delightful, graceful, delicate, but not of any depth either of thought or passion; that is to say, it is exactly right as it is, and where it is. But his next speech slips into the earnestness and the beauty of imagination; now into it, now into fancy only—on the borderland of these two powers—

True, I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy;  
Which is as thin of substance as the air,  
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos  
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,  
And, being anger'd, puffs away from thence,  
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.

It is said that Mercutio was too brilliant for Shakespeare to support at the same level throughout the whole play; and that, had he not been slain, Shakespeare would have had otherwise to get rid of him. It would be hard to agree with that. Shakespeare's wit always answers his call through the whole range of his plays. It ebbs and flows, but when it ebbs it is because he has felt that it should not be too brilliant, not because he was not able to make it brilliant. He carried Falstaff through three long plays, and Falstaff is wittier than Mercutio. Moreover, the wit of Mercutio is that of the time at which he lived, mostly play with words and with far-fetched analogies; and every Oxford and Cambridge scholar, and every courtier, and every literary man exercised himself in it. In some it was richly, in others poorly phrased, but it was common; and whenever it is a habit in society it becomes as easy to produce wit of word-play as it is difficult to produce when it is not the habit. It is tiresome talk to us; it seemed brilliant then. These puns, fantastic turns of phrase, and fancy-pictures, are to us what they were to Romeo—'talk of nothing.' Yet Romeo himself indulged in them before he loved Juliet. His Euphuism then suited his fancy-love for Rosaline; but when the very fire of the god arrived it burned up all this play with words. It has been blamed by critics, and Shakespeare's art, on account of it, called in question. He did not keep it long. When his genius grew out of sketching the particular in man to drawing carefully the universal, he left it by; but when he was a young artist, it was quite natural to represent the common talk of the day, and those who listened to it caught up every point with pleasure. In Mercutio, it grew out of the very nature of the man. Even when he comes to die—and his death is touched with a master-

hand—he does not lose his wit. He still plays with words;

No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve; ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

In vain, in vain! The pathetic weakness of death grows on him; his wit dies in bitter regret for lost joy, in anger with fate. Yet that mounting spirit is brave to the last;

Help me into some house, Benvolio,  
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses!  
They have made worms' meat of me. I have it,  
And soundly too:—your houses!

See how Shakespeare brings home on the lips of the first victim of Justice, working retribution for the guilt of the feud, the main motive of the tragedy.

Tybalt—to continue this sketch of the minor characters—is not, though his ill-temper makes him seem so, a swashbuckler, or a bully. He is the quick-offended duelist of the day, one of those whom the French court called the *raffinés*; hot to challenge a smile, a motion of the hand, but a gentleman quite fit to rank with Benvolio and Mercutio. Like the rest, he is as ready to die as to live. Unlike Benvolio, who is good-temper personified; unlike Romeo, who is quiet by nature; unlike Mercutio, who is good-humoured, but touchy on the point of honour; Tybalt is of a natural bad temper, quarrelsome, liable to fits of fury. When Capulet, who is as hot as he, bids him lay by his rage at Romeo's appearance in his house, and forces peace upon him, his body trembles;

Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting  
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.

'A king of cats,' Mercutio calls him. He slays Mercutio. Romeo, lashed into wrath, slays him. He is the second victim of the event; the second step by which Justice marches through blood to her fixed purpose. His death,

more than Mercutio's, hurries up the catastrophe. Owing to it, Romeo is banished, and Juliet left alone. Owing to it, Capulet forces the County Paris on Juliet. Owing to that, Juliet takes the drug and is thought by Romeo to have died, and Romeo resolves on death.

Another minor character is the Nurse. Those who have seen Mrs. Stirling, when she was old, in that character, have seen it perfectly realised. It is an original drawing after nature; all the characteristics of the type are keenly observed, generalised, and then embodied in one woman. The old retainer of a great house, the confidante of her mistress, and of her master's wild life, she takes the liberties with them both—the impertinences of an old servant—which her knowledge of their life licenses her to take; she advises and reproves them. She is in the inner circle of the house, and has her own man to attend on her. The licence of the day has not left her untouched. She has lost her virgin honour at the age of twelve, and her life has been unrestrained. No morality has been left in her, she is quite without a conscience. Her only morality is in her determination to marry Juliet—it doesn't matter to whom—and the bigamy she advises at the last is quite naturally advised by this naughty old woman. Her only religion is a pleasurable excitement when she listens to Friar Laurence rebuking Romeo in a long speech like a sermon;

O Lord! I could have stay'd here all the night  
To hear good counsel: O, what learning is!

Her life is now made up of garrulous recollections. Like old folk she repeats her stories over and over again, and she loves in them a piece of impropriety to utter over a gossip's bowl. Like Mrs. Gamp, whenever she is worried she calls for a dram. The ruffling Mercutio gives her pleases rather than offends her; and her appeal to Peter to protect her is of an excellent humour. To make herself

of importance she plays with Juliet's anxiety to know if Romeo will come to be married to her; and worse still, she allows Juliet to think that Romeo is slain, not Tybalt; anything to swell her dignity. For this she even torments the only one she loves on earth. To keep up Juliet's anxiety, which, in its reflection, enhances her importance, she deviates from the point incessantly—

JUL. What says he of our marriage? What of that?

NURSE. Lord! how my head aches; what a head have I!  
It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.  
My back o' t' other side; O! my back, my back!

JUL. I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.

Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

NURSE. Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous,  
and a kind, and a handsome, and I warrant a virtuous,—  
Where is your mother?'

And all the time Juliet is simmering with impatient passion.

She has nursed Juliet—they are of one blood, therefore she loves her—and she tells the story of it inimitably; with the nearest and most happy phrases. Falstaff was never better in broad humour. She has brought up Juliet—a more foolish companion for a young girl could scarcely be conceived—but Juliet emerges from her governance as pure as crystal. When Juliet is lifted into womanhood by her love, and gains thereby moral power and spiritual passion, she sees the conscienceless character of this old woman; and when her nurse advises her to marry Paris now that Romeo is banished, she flings the old wretch out of her heart

Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!  
Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.

Yet the old woman is quite endurable. Proper persons cannot approve of her, but it would be difficult for them to be angry with her. She is too human for that. Her garrulity has its charm, and so has her self-sufficiency.

Her immorality is natural and primeval, and, when it is heartless, is more the result of the society in which she has lived than of her original nature. She has good-humour, devotion to her house, physical fondness for her nursling, and a great respect for the Church.

She is the last of the minor characters, except the Friar, whom I omit at present. I turn now to the lovers.

They meet, and at first sight change eyes, like Rosalind and Orlando, like Ferdinand and Miranda. Love rarely *grows* in Shakespeare's hands. If it does, it has to be helped from without, as with Benedick and Beatrice. For the most part, it leaps, full-grown, into life, and is reciprocal. Romeo and Juliet take fire at the same moment. A single kiss unites them for ever: 'their only love sprung from their only hate.' This is the Event to which the previous scenes conduct, and from which the rest follows. It may be said not to have been made by them, but to be the work of a Power without them whose aim is to punish the feud, which has injured human life so long in Verona, by the sacrifice of the lovers and to put an end to it by their sacrifice. They bear the sins of others and carry them away.

This is certainly, even in so early a play, the intention of Shakespeare. The lovers are *star-crossed*. The Friar, at the end of the play, thinking of all he had done to save them and heal the feud, confesses that

A greater power than we can contradict  
Hath thwarted our intents.

Even Romeo and Juliet dimly feel a fateful presence in their love. It steals into that mystic consciousness which underlies our common consciousness, and which vaguely warns and vaguely prophesies. Both the lovers feel beforehand the coming tragedy. This is a piece of the mysticism which lay so deep in Shakespeare's mind,

and which came of his profound conviction that there was a Power behind human life which worked for the whole, and was apparently careless of the individual. Again we are conscious, as the play goes on, of the fierce rapidity with which Justice, once she has begun, hurries on the action with terrible insistence. She sweeps to her conclusion like an eagle on her prey. For a moment human effort tries to interfere. The Friar sends to Romeo to tell him Juliet is not dead, and waits for him. The Power laughs, and stops the messenger. Had he arrived, the lovers had been saved. But the lovers have their reward. They have their little day of perfect joy. They die rather than injure it by living away from it.

As they have leaped into love, so through love they leap into manhood and womanhood. Romeo is now all changed from the dreamer into the man of action, and of action as prompt as Tybalt's sword. He has no sooner seen Juliet at the feast than he storms the orchard wall to see her again.

Can I go forward when my heart is here ?

Turn back, dull earth, and find thy centre out.

He will marry her the day after. Instead of gloomy silence with his companions, as before, his intellect awakens now to life, and he answers Mercutio's wit with equal wit—with greater, for Mercutio owns himself beaten. And more, he finds Romeo so changed that he thinks Romeo has ceased to love at the very moment when for the first time he is really in love. His fanciful love for Rosaline has made him morose and dull; his real love for Juliet makes him sociable and brilliant.

MER. Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature;

Yet, had Mercutio known, it was love that had changed the man. All this is excellently conceived by Shakespeare.

Juliet is also lifted into full womanhood. To compare her speech with her mother and her nurse in the first act with her talk with Romeo in the second, is to know that she has instantly grown out of the child into the woman. All that she does and feels afterwards is pure womanhood, full of intelligence and power as well as passion, lovely in truth, fidelity, and resolution; yet tender and sweet as childhood.

With their love, and by it, their whole nature—moral, intellectual, passionate, and imaginative—is heightened. Both hold their love within moral restraint. They break every convention, but they must have marriage and the blessing of the Church. It must be a sacramental bond which unites them. We do not wonder at the intellectual charm of Romeo's talk, for we have seen it even in his talk about Rosaline; but now, it is no longer on fantastic but natural lines. His passion gives wings to his brain. But we do wonder at the intellectual charm which chimes through the talk of Juliet, at her clear sight of things, at her quiet reasoning and self-control even in the hour when she receives the passion of Romeo and declares her own; at her swift determination when the crisis comes to do the only possible thing; at her luminous vision, before she drinks the drug, of all she has to fear, of all that may happen when she wakes in the tomb.

As to imagination, love has heightened that into splendid expression. It exalts their speech into poetry. All the beautiful world is laid under contribution to illustrate and make more beautiful their love, but the love itself is the most beautiful thing they know. It is the fountain of their eloquence. And surely no love-poetry in the world, rising out of innocent and youthful love, with all the warmth of fresh-awakened nature longing for union, with the full glow of the south yet



with a divine innocence in it, and with faith in the divinity of natural love, was ever written with such beauty as Shakespeare has written the meeting in the orchard, the parting on the wedding night, the call of Juliet before it,

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds.

It is imagination at a high and lovely level; nor does the imagination fail when sorrow is as keen in passion as joy has been. The steady beat of its noble wing is preserved. It is even more strong in the last speech of Romeo or of Juliet than it has been before, for death adds to imagination a last intensity.

When Romeo and Juliet first meet after the Mask Shakespeare, like a great dramatist, encompasses them with scenery as lovely as their love. It is only painted by suggestions through their speech, but we see it quite clearly. It is night, and only the light of stars, when Romeo slips over the wall. There lies the orchard, and there the balcony where Juliet stands. While they speak, the moon rises, and 'tips with silver all the fruit-tree-tops.' Before they part, the morning is at hand.

Romeo in the deep shade speaks to himself, and then hears his mistress tell of her love for him. What an outburst of sweet speech! it makes one in love with youth and love. It runs close to the edge of the Overmuch, but does not fall over it; it is hyperbole, but many men would be happy if such hyperbole were natural to them; if they could feel so deeply as to make it true. There is not a phrase which Romeo uses which is not the necessary expression of life at its overflow into infinity. Only a vast indefinite sea and its furthest shore can image his infinite of love.

I am no pilot ; yet, wert thou as far  
As that vast shore wash'd with the furthest sea,  
I would adventure for such merchandise.

Juliet is equally passionate ; but of course Shakespeare,

with his exquisite tenderness for women, has saved her innocence from too great unreserve. She speaks to the night her love, unaware of her listener; and when she knows he has heard her confession, she delays her yielding with an array of questions, seeking to recover her maiden reserve. When she yields, her speech is perfect in its womanhood; and then, having established her delicate maidenhood, excused her seeming light behaviour, she is as frank in her love's confession as the day. Her childhood and her womanhood meet in this together; her innocent joy in loving and her passion for her lover; now a woman, now a child. She lives on that sweet borderland. At last, passion, like Romeo, seeks the infinite to express itself, and Juliet uses, but in other ways, the same symbol as he has done;

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep: the more I give to thee,  
The more I have, for both are infinite.

They part with lingering, sweet delay. Juliet's speech has slowly grown bolder, yet more delicate; and the harmonious mingling of these two qualities is beautiful. Romeo's speech has passed into a deep simplicity and quiet, as if he felt too much to speak; it is only when Juliet is gone that he says the truest and most impassioned thing,

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!  
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest.

And now the morning comes. Juliet has no past, and waits for the future. But Romeo's past is known to the Friar, whom he has to persuade to marry him to Juliet. 'Tis a difficult task, and the Friar is astounded when he hears that Rosaline is utterly forgotten—

Holy St. Francis! what a change is here!

but blindly working the will of Justice, he agrees to marry them in order to turn 'their households' rancour

to pure love'—so carefully does Shakespeare knit into the theme of the play even this sacred personage. But he is also careful to individualise the man into a varied character.

Shakespeare was kind to friars, and Laurence is one of the best of them. All Verona respects him; and though he has played an audacious part in marrying a Capulet to a Montague and in drugging Juliet, his statement of the whole case at the end is listened to quietly, and approved. The Prince does not even reprove him;

We still have known thee for a holy man.

He has done this for policy, to reconcile the feud of the houses. It meets the fate that the interference of churchmen in affairs most often meets. Yet he is more the man than the churchman. Indeed, in his humorous mocking of Romeo for his forgetting of Rosaline, in his tolerance of the hot blood of youth, as well as in his challenge to Romeo to be a man and face his suffering down, he is not only a charitable priest, but also a man of the world. He still remembers his own youth, and has an ancient tenderness for the lovers; too old not to try and moderate the hurry of their passion by his experience, not too old to be kindly to it; charmed into poetry by Juliet's lovely youth and by tender memories of his own youth which awaken at her sight—

Here comes the lady : O ! so light a foot  
Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint :  
A lover may bestride the gossamer  
That idles in the wanton summer air,  
And yet not fall : so light is vanity.

His age is sententious but not dry; we hear in his sermonising that gentle philosophy of life which in a good man is nurtured by loneliness. Nor does his bland philosophy want a touch of quiet poetry. His eye is

quick to see and his voice to celebrate the beauty of nature, when in the dawn he comes from his cell ;

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,  
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,  
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels  
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.

He mingles a rustic science with his poetic feeling ; a gentle herbalist who loves and studies the medicinal plants of the earth, and gathers them for use. While yet the dew is deep he seeks them, and musing on their qualities and comparing them with the nature of man, so slips into his pensive philosophy—a many-natured man ! The passage has its charm, and beyond that admits us into one of these curious side-paths into which Shakespeare wandered in his brooding thoughts on life.

O ! mickle is the powerful grace that lies  
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities :  
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,  
But to the earth some special good doth give,  
Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse ;  
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,  
And vice sometime's by action dignified.  
Within the infant rind of this small flower  
Poison hath residence and medicine power :  
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part ;  
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.  
Two such opposed kings encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will ;  
And where the worser is predominant,  
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

The event which started the movement of the tragedy, that is, the sudden love of Romeo and Juliet, is now rounded and fulfilled. They are married, and it seems as if the deed had awakened to her work the Justice who punishes and reconciles the feud which had so long distressed Verona. Before even the wedding-night of the lovers, she brings to their death Mercutio and Tybalt.

It is the first of the steps she takes to attain her end, and she takes it in spite of Romeo, who hates to fight with Tybalt, Juliet's 'dear cousin.' But he is driven against his will by an outside power to slay him. Shakespeare makes that plain. And now, again, all the streets of Verona are in confusion; again the Prince enters the scene to denounce the quarrel, again the far-off cause of the tragedy is laid before us. Then Romeo is banished. We leave the civic strife behind, and are now, until the end, involved in the personal fate of the lovers.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's contrasting manner that now, at the very moment when doom begins to darken over the lovers, he places on Juliet's lips in solitude (for indeed we must conceive her words as thought by her, not spoken) that rapturous invocation to her wedding-night in which the very height of the mingled joy of sense and spirit in embracing love is imagined and longed for before it is realised. Many would not have dared to express it; few would have felt they had the power to do it, and to keep it free from grossness. But it slips, in absolute ease, from Shakespeare's sympathy with pure yet passionate maidenhood into language so exquisitely balanced between sensuous and spiritual passion, so thrilled with both inextricably interwoven, so exalted by joy, so on fire with beauty, and all so uplifted by the spirit of imagination, that it seems as if nothing so wonderful was ever written in the world, as if, having been written, it should always be felt to be thought rather than written.

On this youth and ravishment falls the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Her lover has slain her cousin on her wedding-day, so hot, so quick is Justice on her trail. The to-and-fro of her sorrow and her love, the final conquest of her sorrow for Tybalt and of her momentary repulsion from the Montague who has slain a Capulet, the disappearance of all anger, all sorrow, all ties of

blood, of all the rest of the world, in love and Romeo, is a wonderful piece of subtle analysis, the more subtle from the simplicity of its execution.

Romeo's misery is not less impassioned, but more despairing. The man does not react as quickly as the woman, nor see, as quickly as she does, that nothing matters but the fulfilment of their love. The sentence of banishment brings back the despondent elements in his character, and the Friar inspirits him in vain. He is seized by those quick despairs of youth which an older man leaves behind him. Nothing can be truer to nature than this; and as true is his swift return to life and joy when he hears that Juliet will receive him. They meet at night in wedded passion, drinking its joy upon the narrow edge of death. That mercy Justice permits them. They win it, as it were with violence, out of her grim sacrifice of them for her own ends. And we are almost satisfied that they should die, we almost accept the cruelty of their fate, because they have had their perfect hour. Death is not much, when life has once reached the top of joy.

Then comes the parting in the Italian morning. We taste its air and see its skies as they speak. The nightingale in the pomegranate tree is silent, the lark has begun to sing—

whose notes do beat  
The vaulty heavens so high above our heads.

The dawn grows grey, then bright—

Look, love, what envious streaks  
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

But more beautiful even than this beauty of nature is the passion in their hearts and its expression—steeped in sorrow, drenched in love, still trembling with desire. And because of these, of a poetry so exquisite in feeling, so

exalted by imagination, so thrilled with the memory of satisfied love and with the agony of present departure, and of so perfect a melody, that it seems made of the best of all the poets of the world. Sorrow and fear give keenness to the lingering of love; and hope, almost afraid, glides into the verse and then retreats. The shadow darkens over them; the mysticism of Shakespeare intrudes on their parting, to presage their death—

- JUL. O ! think'st thou we shall ever meet again ?  
 ROM. I doubt it not ; and all these woes shall serve  
 For sweet discourses in our time to come.  
 JUL. O God ! I have an ill-divining soul :  
 Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,  
 As one dead in the bottom of a tomb :  
 Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.  
 ROM. And trust me, love, in my eye so do you :  
 Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu ! adieu !

So Romeo departs, banished by the hand of Justice. Then she plays her next card, swiftly driving on her action. If she were not a goddess, it were unseemly haste to marry Juliet one day to Romeo, and propose the next day that she should be married to County Paris. Yet that is what she does, that is the card she plays in her determined speed. No sooner is Juliet out of Romeo's arms, than her mother comes in with this new proposition. It is enough to madden the child; though her intellectual power is never better seen than in the way she seems to attack Romeo for Tybalt's death, while in reality she expresses her love for him; and she refuses indignantly. Her father rates her with senile fury; his language shocks her mother and her nurse; we see the temper which has made the feud continue; and Juliet is silenced into one piteous prayer—

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds  
 That sees into the bottom of my grief ?

Her mother leaves her—'Do as thou wilt, for I have

done with thee.' She turns to her Nurse; a sense of fate is in the words, and great piteousness;

Alack, alack! that heaven should practise stratagems  
Upon so soft a subject as myself!

What say'st thou? hast thou not a word of joy?  
Some comfort, Nurse?

But the only consolation the Nurse gives is to advise immediate marriage with Paris, who is 'a lovely gentleman.' Few passages reveal in briefer words more of lonely despair than those in which Juliet meets this traitorous counsel. Father, mother, Nurse are all against her, but this girl of fourteen is resolute: she knits her powers together into quietude. What she will do, she will do alone—

JUL. Speakest thou this from thy heart?

NURSE. And from my soul too;  
Or else beshrew them both.

JUL. Amen!

NURSE. What!

JUL. Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous much.  
Go in; and tell my lady I am gone,  
Having displeas'd my father, to Laurence' cell,  
To make confession, and to be absolved.

NURSE. Marry, I will; and this is wisely done.

[Exit NURSE.]

JUL. Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!

To deepen her misery, she meets Paris, its cause, who claims her for his wife, at the Friar's cell. Her despair helps her to be reticent. Only when he goes, does her passion break forth—

O! shut the door! and when thou hast done so,  
Come, weep with me; past hope, past cure, past help!

Rather than marry Paris, her knife shall play the umpire in this strife between her honour and her fate. Her speech is wild, the outburst of long-repressed pain, seeking in whirling images to relieve itself. But what a difference from the child of the first act! A few days of love have done the work of many years. Her woman-



hood is not only born; it is mature enough to look death in the face. Yet her youth makes death seem horrible, and she is haunted by its ghastly images;

Or shut me nightly in a charnel house,  
O'ercover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,  
With reeky shanks, and yellow chapless skulls;  
Or bid me go into a new-made grave  
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud;

She is sane in her resolution of death rather than dishonour, half insane in her imagination—a subtle situation of the soul, such as Shakespeare loved, in the midst of his simplicities of passion, to draw for his own delight.

The Friar then proposes the drug which shall make her seem dead for forty-two hours, and Romeo shall fetch her then away from the tomb of the Capulets. She takes the drug that night, alone, with a woman's wild courage, but with a child's imaginative fears, and the fourth act closes with her apparent death. Meantime Justice, not to be balked, plays her next card. She so arranges events that the Friar's letter to Romeo fails to reach him. And then the ruin rushes, without a break, to its close. The fifth act doubles and redoubles the fierce hurry of Justice to her aim. There is no scene more heavy-laden with death than that in the churchyard, nor one in which the scenery is more vividly conceived. Fear, trembling, and horror possess all the characters but Romeo, Paris, and Juliet; their love lifts them above the power of Death's attendants. Darkness is everywhere; only a lanthorn lights the tomb. The yew-trees darken the churchyard. The ground is loose, infirm with digging up of graves. Romeo cries out at the tomb in a madness of raging grief,

Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,

as he wrenches open the door. It is a masterpiece of representation to the intellectual eye. No visible scenery is needed.

The dramatic action is not less remarkable: the incessant rush of circumstance, the change of the actors at every moment, save when Romeo is alone in the tomb; the haste, the high-pitched excitement of all the characters, even of the Page and Balthasar, as if the fierce passion of Romeo had infected them all; the silences, the cries from every part of the churchyard! And finally the watch, the rousing of the town, the rush of Capulet and Montague to the grave, the streets full with running men and women, the Prince, and in the midst Paris, Romeo, and Juliet dead. We are lost in admiration. Only a playwright could have composed it for the stage, and the playwright one whose imaginative genius excelled Bacon's as the sun excels the moon.

But I return to the beginning of the act. It opens with Romeo at Mantua, waiting for news. It is characteristic of Shakespeare's mysticism, that, as he has made both Romeo and Juliet have presentiments of evil, so here he represents a common contrary—that excited happiness of the spirit which so frequently precedes death and ruin, the state the Scots call 'fey.' Romeo has had sweet dreams;

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,  
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand;  
My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne;  
And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit  
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.

On that, swift as lightning, comes the news that Juliet is dead. He receives it with the same quiet with which Juliet received the news that she was to be married to Paris, that quiet which comes of the instant and intense resolve to die. His youth is swift to act, as swift as his absolute despair. The resolute centre of all his sorrow is given in a word;

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.

The means are at hand—'I do remember an apothecary'

—a famous description, and so long that some have wondered that Romeo, in his intense passion, could enter into so much and so clear detail. But it is often when passion is most intense that men not only see outward things most sharply and in minute detail, but also, perhaps to relieve the awful strain within, play with the illusive scenery of life. All the deeper is his resolve to die. It is piteous that he so young should suddenly become cynical, but Shakespeare knew the quick-changing heart of youth when despair has fallen on love. This is a momentary cry. There is nothing of its bitterness in the soliloquy in the tomb.

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,  
Doing more murders in this loathsome world,  
Than these poor compounds that thou may'st not sell :  
I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none.  
Farewell ; buy food, and get thyself in flesh.

And he races to Verona to die by Juliet's side.

Paris has been before him. Justice wants another victim to make the sacrifice complete, and Paris is laying flowers on the body of Juliet when Romeo enters. We hear from what he says to Balthasar, his servant, into what fierce intensity he has been wrought during the long night of travel. If thou return'st to pry

In what I further shall intend to do,  
By heaven, I will tear thee joint by joint,  
And strew this hungry churchyard with thy limbs ;  
The time and my intents are savage wild.

What chance has poor, foolish Paris with one whom deadly sorrow all night long has wrought? Romeo tries to save him. In vain ! he falls, and dies for his love ;

If thou be merciful,  
Open the tomb, lay me with Juliet.

Romeo recognises him, and that he is one writ with him in sour misfortune's book. Death brings all enmities

into harmony, and he lays Paris in the tomb. And there is Juliet, whose beauty makes the vault full of light. He speaks, and ever since all the world has listened. We see the silence, the dim light, the vaulted tomb, the lovely face, not dead, but dead to him. His soul lives in every word, his love, his sorrow, his imaginative fire, his unutterable weariness of life. Tenderness is supreme in this lovely speech. Truth thrills through it like a spirit; beauty, like another spirit, is wedded to the truth in it, and the 'passion of death' lifts the truth and beauty and tenderness of it into the world where death is lost in life.

How oft when men are at the point of death  
 Have they been merry! which their keepers call  
 A lightning before death: O! how may I  
 Call this a lightning? O my love! my wife!  
 Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,  
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:  
 Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet  
 Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there.  
 Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?  
 O! what more favour can I do to thee,  
 Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain  
 To sunder his that was thine enemy?  
 Forgive me, cousin! Ah! dear Juliet,  
 Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe  
 That unsubstantial Death is amorous,  
 And that the lean abhorred monster keeps  
 Thee here in dark to be his paramour?  
 For fear of that I still will stay with thee,  
 And never from this palace of dim night  
 Depart again: here, here will I remain  
 With worms that are thy chambermaids; O! here  
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,  
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars  
 From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!  
 Arms, take your last embrace! and lips, O you  
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss  
 A dateless bargain to engrossing death?  
 Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!  
 Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on  
 The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!

Who is to act this? Shakespeare has thought more than any actor can represent.

Nor is Juliet's death less passionate, though swifter. A woman does not play with thought or its expression on the edge of death. Moreover, she has faced death for the last three days. She is accustomed to its companionship.

What's here? a cup, clos'd in my true love's hand?  
 Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end.  
 O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
 To help me after! I will kiss thy lips;  
 Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them,  
 To make me die with a restorative. [*Kisses him.*]  
 Thy lips are warm!

O happy dagger!

This is thy sheath; there rest, and let me die.

And in the tomb is the silence of three dead lovers. On this silence comes the uproar I have described: the cries of the watch, the arrest of the Friar, of the Page, and Balthasar; the Capulets, the Montagues, the people and the Prince. The stage fills.

Justice has done her work. She has passed through a lake of innocent blood to her end. Tybalt, Mercutio, Paris, Romeo, Juliet, Lady Montague, have all died that she might punish the hate between the houses. Men recognise at last that a Power beyond them has been at work. 'A greater power,' cries the Friar to Juliet, 'than we can contradict hath thwarted our intents.' The Friar explains the work of Justice to the Prince; the Prince applies the punishment to the guilty—

Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!  
 See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,  
 That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love;  
 And I, for winking at your discords too,  
 Have lost a brace of kinsmen; all are punish'd.

The reconciliation follows. That is the aim of Justice. The long sore of the state is healed. But at what a price?

We ask, was it just or needful to slay so many for this end? Could it not have been otherwise done? And Shakespeare, deeply convinced, even in his youth, of the irony of life, deeply affected by it as all his tragedies prove, has left us with that problem to solve, in this, the first of his tragedies; and has surrounded the problem with infinite pity and love, so that, if we are troubled, it may be angry, with the deeds of the gods, we are soothed and uplifted by our reverent admiration for humanity.

Shakespeare could not tell, nor can we, how otherwise it might have been shaped; but to be ignorant is not to be content. We are left by the problem in irritation. If the result the gods have brought about be good, the means they used seem clumsy, even cruel, and we do not understand. This is a problem which incessantly recurs in human life, and as Shakespeare represented human life, it passes like a questioning spirit through several of his plays. I do not believe that he began any play with the intention of placing it before us, much less of trying to solve it. But as he wrote on, the problem emerged under his hand, and he became aware of it. He must have thought about it, and there are passages in *Romeo and Juliet* which suggest such thinking, and such passages are more frequent in the after tragedies. But with that strange apartness of his from any personal share in human trouble, which is like that of a spirit outside humanity—all the more strange because he represented that trouble so vividly and felt for it so deeply—he does not attempt to solve or explain the problem. He contents himself with stating the course of events which constitute it, and with representing how human nature, specialised in distinct characters, feels when entangled in it.

This is his general way of creating, and it is the way of the great artist who sets forth things as they are, but

neither analyses nor moralises them. But this does not prevent any dominant idea of the artist, such as might arise in his imagination from contemplation of his subject, pervading the whole of his work, even unconsciously arranging it and knitting it into unity. Such an idea seems to rule this play. It seems from the way the events are put by Shakespeare and their results worked out, that he conceived a Power behind the master-event who caused it and meant the conclusion to which it was brought. This Power might be called Destiny or Nemesis—terms continually used by writers on Shakespeare, but which seem to me to assume in his knowledge modes of thought of which he was unaware. What he does seem to think is; That, in the affairs of men, long-continued evil, such as the hatreds of the Montagues and Capulets or the Civil Wars in England, was certain to be tragically broken up by the suffering it caused, and to be dissolved in a reconciliation which should confess the evil and establish its opposite good; and that this was the work of a divine Justice which, through the course of affairs, made known that all hatreds—as in this case and in the Civil Wars—were against the Universe. We may call this Power Fate or Destiny. It is better to call it, as the Greek did, Justice. This is the idea which Shakespeare makes preside over *Romeo and Juliet*, and over the series of plays which culminates in *Richard III.* When we come to the great tragedies this belief of his seems to have suffered shock. Though it lingers in *Hamlet* in such a phrase as this of Horatio's—'There's a divinity doth shape our ends, Rough hew them as we may'—yet it has weakened; and it seems replaced in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by the conception of a Destiny which drives its victims headlong to their death or ruin, and the larger ends of whose justice, if it be just at all, we do not see clearly as we see them in *Romeo and Juliet*

and in *Richard III*. Hamlet dies a victim of events which occurred before he comes to Elsinore, and carries with him to death innocent and guilty alike. Without those events his character would not have slain him. No good is seen to arise from his tragedy. 'The rest is silence,' says Shakespeare. A blind, half-supernatural power of evil starts Macbeth on his course of crime, not the desire of Justice to set wrong things right in the state. Things were not wrong under Duncan. Macbeth's crime brings its natural result, but we are not made conscious of a presiding Justice as we are in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare seems to have lost that belief.

In *Lear* and *Othello* it is not only weakened or lost, it is opposed, it seems, by another conception, or perhaps I should say by another temper of mind, which, looking at the world's misery and guilt, was led to feel rather than to conceive that it was not Justice or Destiny that ruled the world, but a ruthless irony which played with men and women to pleasure its own cynicism, as if the gods sat in a theatre and watched with weary eyes the tragedy, comedy, or farce they ordained for their careless entertainment. It is not Justice which is done; Justice is not their aim, but amusement. And when the curtain is rung down, they think no more of *Lear*, *Othello*, *Troilus*, or *Timon*. It is not even the Destiny of the Greek which sacrifices *Othello*, *Cordelia*, *Desdemona*, or even *Ophelia*. It is a blind or a cynical Will which plays with men and women as if they were marionettes. It was well that Shakespeare did not for long continue in this temper, but that he passed through it is, I think, not to be doubted by those who read *Othello*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and especially *King Lear*. He is passing out of it in *Coriolanus*, and in *Julius Cæsar* he has emerged from it.

Nevertheless, this temper did not wholly master him



while he was under its sway. A strange impression, like a spirit proceeding out of the whole of his tragic work, a subconscious efflux from it, leads us to feel, through the pity with which he encompasses the victims of sorrow, and through the nobleness with which he clothes them, that they were not the mere sport of an ironical Power, but rose above it into a higher world, where such a Power could not follow them. It is so when we think of Othello and Desdemona, of Lear and Cordelia. I do not say that Shakespeare was directly conscious of making such an impression when he wrote *Lear* and *Othello*. He could scarcely be, as long as he felt that Justice did not rule the world. But he does make it on us, and in him it was an unconscious reversion to that original type of his thought about the universe, which is to be found in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Richard III*. He there imagined an eternal Justice, such as Æschylus conceived, 'the virgin daughter of Zeus,' who directed the fates of men and who insisted that evil should come to an end.

Yet there is a difference. The work of Justice in Æschylus is simple. No complex problem is bound up with it; it is the assertion of divine law in the punishment of the guilty. But in *Romeo and Juliet* the work of Justice is done through the sorrow and death of the innocent, and the evil Justice attacks is destroyed through the sacrifice of the guiltless. Justice, as Shakespeare saw her, moving to issues which concern the whole, takes little note of the sufferings of individuals save to use them, if they are good and loving, for her great purposes, as if that were enough to make them not only acquiescent but happy. Romeo and Juliet, who are quite guiltless of the hatreds of their clans, and who embody the loving-kindness which would do away with them, are condemned to mortal pain and sorrow of death. Shakespeare accepted this apparent in-

justice as the work of Justice; and the impression made at the end upon us, which impression does not arise from the story itself, but steals into us from the whole work of Shakespeare on the story, is that Justice may have done right, though we do not understand her ways. The tender love of the two lovers and its beauty, seen in their suffering, awaken so much pity and love that the guilty are turned away from their evil hatreds, and the evil itself is destroyed. And with regard to the sufferers themselves, there is that—we feel with Shakespeare—in their pain and death which not only redeems and blesses the world they have left, but which also lifts them into that high region of the soul where suffering and death seem changed into joy and life. We think of them, but in a way we cannot explain, no longer with pity, but with a certainty that all is well with them, that they have arisen into a true happiness, have become a vital portion of the Justice and Love which sacrificed them for the welfare of the whole. Instead of mourning over their fate, we are content: as we are content when Cordelia and Desdemona perish, even though Shakespeare, grimmer then than he is now, does not bring any recognisable good out of their pain. Even in their sorrow, still more in the wild misery of Othello, we feel by a kind of subconsciousness that they are in that kingdom of the soul, and worthy of it, where the pain and death of earth are like dreams when one awaketh, where what they have become through suffering lives for the inspiration of humanity and attracts its love.

A few observations may be made on the poetry of this play. First, it is sometimes conventional in its phrases. Shakespeare was a playwright, and his audience expected to hear, certainly at intervals, the phraseology to which they were accustomed. It was wise, then, of him to use

it, and even at times to heighten beyond the simplicity of nature the speech of his characters. Such a convention occurs in the speeches of Old Montague and Benvolio in the first act, which describe Romeo's isolation in his love for Rosaline. They are more flowery than natural. But with regard to them and other conventions in the play, they are so inspirited with imagination that we forget they are conventions, and are almost surprised into accepting them as natural because they are so beautifully said. Moreover, in the special instance I have mentioned, we forgive them, not only for their beauty, but also because they strike the keynote of the love-poetry of the play, and enable us to grow into the passionate temper in which the orchard scene and Juliet's invocation and the parting in the morning of the lovers are conceived and wrought. They are another example of Shakespeare's careful gradation.

Secondly, certain soliloquies must be considered as representing thought, not speech. They are to make the audience understand what is passing through the mind of the character, not what, under the circumstances, he would have said aloud. Not all, but a large number of Shakespeare's soliloquies are of this character. A maiden might easily say aloud what Juliet says at the beginning of the night scene from her balcony. It is intimate, but not too intimate for speech. But her speech,

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,

represents the secret passion of her body and soul, and Juliet would not in life have said it aloud. And her soliloquy when in bed she takes the drug is also a representation of her thoughts; it was not spoken in reality. The dramatist is compelled to put it into words and the actress to speak it—but to add to it gesture or great changes in the voice or outward show is to mistake altogether the idea of the dramatist. These soliloquies

should be kept quiet; the actor or actress should, while they speak them, feel them to represent voiceless thought; and the audience should listen to them with the same feeling. If we take this view of them, and that Shakespeare meant them to be so considered, a great deal in them which seems too fantastical, too wild, even too sensational for fine poetry, is both natural and excusable. In some soliloquies, as for instance that of Romeo in the tomb, the contents are mixed. Of this much was said aloud, but some things were only thought by Romeo, and a great actor should make this clear. When he does, he varies easily the delivery of a soliloquy which is too often ranted from beginning to end, and ranted most when it ought to be most quiet.

I have spoken of the love-poetry. It has, whether in its sorrow or delight, the passion, the charm, and the over-brimming of youth. Imagination is in it like a living spirit, but fancy plays through its lighter thoughts, as when Juliet cries,

Give me my Romeo : and, when he shall die,  
Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
That all the world will be in love with night,  
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Its hyperbole is natural to youth. Moreover, Shakespeare knew the Italian tales where this kind of love-talk is so frequent that it must rank as conventional. But in Shakespeare's hands it is exalted into poetry by his impassioned imagination, and his incessant aspiration to beauty. Finally, he has in this poetry that modern quality which combines human passion with the doings of nature. He harmonises nature to the human feeling of the hour. The moon on the orchard-trees, the solitary star, the silent nightingale, and the lark heralding the morn, are as much in tune with the hearts of the lovers as the roaring wind and cataract-rain are to the heart of Lear.

### III

## RICHARD II

IN 1592, the first part of *Henry VI.* was acted at the Rose Theatre, on March 3. The second part, it is presumed, followed; and the third part the following autumn. These plays were originally written by other men than Shakespeare and were, as some conjecture, revised by Shakespeare and Marlowe in partnership. If so, Shakespeare worked afterwards upon them alone, after Marlowe's death. There are passages, notably at the end of the third part of *Henry VI.*, where Gloucester's character is brought into harmony with his character in *Richard III.*, which are entirely from Shakespeare's hand. Whether these Gloucester passages were written before or after *Richard III.*, they lead up to that play, which of all the historical plays of Shakespeare is said to be the first composed, and was probably acted early in 1593. *Richard II.* followed, it is supposed, almost immediately on *Richard III.*; and many say that as the verse and style of *Richard III.* emulated Marlowe's, so *Richard II.* was suggested by Marlowe's *Edward II.* It may be so, I do not know. What we do know is that the work of both plays is done in the manner of an artist whose style is his own. In fire and fury of movement and utterance, in passion of action and rhetoric, in dramatic power and in gloom of fate, *Richard III.* is greater, or shall I say more remarkable, than *Richard II.* In wisdom, thoughtfulness, in a wider range over human nature, in a kindlier humanity, a softer glow, in the pity

which accompanies the dark work of fate, and especially in the loveliness of the poetry, *Richard II.* excels *Richard III.* It seems astonishing that within a year, two plays, each so great, yet each imbued with so different a spirit, should have been written; but after all it is, at this creative time, no more astonishing than the writing within a few years of plays so different as *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II.*

There are, however, other reasons which suggest that *Richard II.* preceded *Richard III.* *Richard II.* is more full of the flowing poetry, so rich in sentiment, which belongs to most of the previous plays. Rhyme is the natural form of such poetry, and it is used copiously in *Richard II.*, and very sparingly in *Richard III.* The play has less power, less incident, less action, and more of sentiment than *Richard III.*; it is less close in texture and less complex—that is, it is inferior in dramatic strength and vitality. As an historical drama *Richard III.* is on a higher level than *Richard II.* Both are fateful, but the fate that broods over *Richard III.* is of a deeper, more solemn gloom, and seems to argue a more experienced hand, a graver cast of thought, a more serious view of history. These considerations might lead us to say that *Richard III.* followed its companion; a conclusion I do not accept.

The discussion, however, as to which was first, is not of any importance. The plays were written within the same year, and the reason of their difference in manner, strength, experience, and versification may not arise from any change in Shakespeare's dramatic power, but simply from an artist's desire of change. Shakespeare may have written them differently in order to vary his hand, or because he felt that the character of *Richard II.*, being itself sentimental, fantastic, and fluent, was best represented by the fluid, hurrying, rhyming measures he used, and that of *Richard III.* by the stately gravity of blank

verse. The subject then, in both cases, would make the differences.

Why did Shakespeare and his fellows begin to write plays the subjects of which were drawn from English history? It was that a change had passed over the spirit of England. She had begun to realise, as she had not before, how great she was, how separate from other nations, how free from foreign influences and powers, how united, in spite of some hostile and dividing elements, were her Queen and nobles, burghers and people. A great and imaginative pride in England filled the hearts of men before 1580, thirteen years before *Richard III.*, and is plainly revealed in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Loyalty to Elizabeth as representing this great people now became a passion. France and Spain, hating her Protestantism, were against the Queen; and though she did not wish for war, though she and her ministers avoided it all they could, yet they matched themselves, in the secret drift of their policy, against the Continental powers; played France against Spain and Spain against France, till Philip, the great overshadower of Europe, was sorely troubled. When the sea-dogs of England took up the game, bled, harried, and plundered Spain in the Spanish main, the folk in England praised God. When in 1587 Drake came home laden with spoil, having ravaged the cities, and taken the galleons, of the western coasts of the Americas, and rounded the world; when he stormed Spain in her own ports, singeing the very beard of Philip, England burst into pride and joy. Philip at last was hurried into fury; and all the world looked on with wonder when the Armada, manned by the flower of Spain, was driven to flight by a host of small ships; and in her flight perished, ship by ship, in the northern seas, and on the western coasts of Great Britain and Ireland.

The victory was felt to be not only political but moral.

God, they said, was on the side of England; and the heart of her people swelled with a religious awe and gratitude when it felt itself chosen as the avenger of injustice and cruelty; swelled as high with personal pride when it also began to know itself to be the mistress of the seas. No wonder the *Faerie Queene* rose from the heart of Spenser. No wonder the dramatists, and Marlowe beyond the rest in *Edward II.*, began the long series of historical plays. No wonder Shakespeare, whose humanity felt all that the nation felt, turned to record the history of his people; and having re-edited *Henry VI.*, began with *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* to describe the past sins, sorrows, glories, and the march of freedom, of his people. All his historical plays have their root in patriotism or some outburst of patriotic passion. It were well to collect them together, but none are finer, not even the closing words of the Royal Bastard in *King John*,

This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue  
If England to itself do rest but true.

than the great cry of Gaunt from his dying bed in *Richard II.* All who love their country know it well. This patriotism fills the heart of *Henry IV.*: and the play of *Henry V.* is full of the sound of trumpets blowing to the glory of England. Had it not been so damaged by the pirates who took it up eagerly because it so spread-eagled England, it would have come down to us less injured by passages unworthy of Shakespeare's dignity.

Of this historical and patriotic drama these two Richard-plays are the first entirely written by Shakespeare. He made of them—and this point is of great interest—a framework to enclose a greater drama of the Civil Wars.



He traced their origin, as he conceived it to be, in the usurpation of Bolingbroke and the deposition of Richard. He drew in *Richard II.* the political causes, which were also the moral causes, of Richard's overthrow, and pre-  
saged the evils which would follow for the state from the rough seizure of the crown by Bolingbroke.

Then he drew in *Richard III.* the close; the final working out by avenging Justice of the punishment of civil war. He made it clear that the war was caused by the ambitions, jealousies, hatreds of great princes and nobles, who remembered only themselves, and forgot the welfare of the people. As the story of *Romeo and Juliet* expressed the wrath of Justice against the hatreds by which the Montagues and Capulets disquieted Verona, so the dramas from *Richard II.* to *Richard III.* told how the justice of moral evolution punished the kings and nobles who made England swim in blood.

When Shakespeare had written the beginning and the end of this, it stole into the chambers of his imagination to write the intermediate story, to paint the full picture. He had already done some of this work in the three parts of *Henry VI.*; and I think he now made a fresh revision of those plays, and added some few things to them, which would serve to round out this idea of his. Then he filled up his space with *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.*, and the thing was done.

Some suggest he did this with a purpose—to show what bad government was, and its evils; what good government was, and its results. I do not think this true. His purpose was artistic. He desired to complete his conception, to combine all the plays into a whole. In completing it, the moral and political philosophy of good or bad government came in, as a necessary part of the conception, but its lessons were not directly but indirectly given. His true aim was to represent human life in action

and thought within the events which history laid before him. He did that; and then the parts shaped themselves, under his guiding conception, into an artistic whole. He saw it, and rejoiced.

The artistic result is remarkable. We have, in these eight plays, not only eight separate plays, five of which are complete within themselves, but one single drama also, with a unity of its own, with one subject, with one end to which they look forward, and with one divine Justice in them, slowly working out its laws to their fulfilment. And the years over which this mighty drama extends are nearly ninety years. I wish it were possible to act them all in the same day. It would then be seen that *Richard III.* wound up that web of fate which began to be woven in *Richard II.*; and which, weaving on through *Henry IV., V., and VI.*, contains in its living tapestry so great and various a representation of human life as never yet was brought together and harmonised by any genius in the modern world; of life in all classes of society; of life passing from the most tragic sorrows to the most comic even the rudest pleasures; life in the streets of London, in the country, on the battlefield, in the council, at the court and the alehouse, in the camps of France and England, by the dying bed of kings, and in the garret where Falstaff passed away with a broken heart.

The Greek trilogies carry us through long histories, and they are united by the dominance of Destiny working out her moral will. This eight-played drama is a bolder effort. The justice of God, ruling states (for such at this time of his life was Shakespeare's belief), works out in these plays his single aim, and unites them into one Drama. Again, they have not the same unbroken solemnity and dignity which the Greek trilogies possess. They are broken up with comedy and farce, with many scenes unrelated to the end, with the creation of a host of

needless characters, with many things said and done which exceed just measure. They have indeed their great and dignified scenes both of action and speech, scattered and mingled through the rest, and these have a great weight and power. They heighten and establish the whole impression, given to us in the plays, of human life which indeed is a more mingled landscape than any Greek play represents. The plays have, then, a greater variety, a larger range over human life, than any single trilogy; nor do they want, when we feel them as a whole, an awful solemnity. Their work is unequal, and that is not the case with the giant work of Æschylus, or the steady greatness of Sophocles—men who do not drop below their power; but Shakespeare was now only learning his work. We do not have him here at his best. Moreover, and this is a great pity, the three plays of *Henry VI.* are not originally from his hand. Had he rewritten them altogether, and on the same level as even the two Richard plays, the splendour of this great single drama, made up of eight plays, would blind the eyes of the intellect and of the soul of man.

Again, the dramas of *Richard II.* and *III.* are purely historical. Their subject, their persons, their events, were taken by Shakespeare, without change, almost without addition, from the chronicles. They move among kings, nobles, and their dependants. The people are unrepresented except by one or two persons, like the gardener in *Richard II.*, like the two citizens in *Richard III.*

In the second type of the historical play which Shakespeare afterwards invented—in *Henry IV.* and *V.*—many additions are made to the history. The people are brought in, and drawn with mastery. The great folk are there, but so are the other classes—the country justice, his servant, the rustic recruits, the common soldiers, the mistress of a London tavern, the grooms,

ostlers, and travellers, thieves, sheriff-officers, courtezans and bullies, the broken-down gentleman, the merchants, the clergy,—a crowd of types, all invented, all making history vital, all disclosing what lay beneath the battles of kings and nobles, of kites and crows, in the upper air of society.

*Richard II.* has none of this, nor *Richard III.* Nothing is added to events, or to the personages, save the development of their characters. In this play, the character of Richard, carefully and slowly wrought, dominates the whole, makes the events and makes the catastrophe. It is the play. The character of Bolingbroke is quite secondary. Its outlines are drawn, but they are only partly filled up. What he is meant to be is more seen in his opposition to Richard than in himself. He is the strong man against the background of whose character the weakness of Richard stands out clear. But Shakespeare kept the full presentation of his character till he came to write *Henry IV.*

The Duke of York is a good sketch, but in his senile bluster of words, and his weak reversal of them when any action is required, and in his soft yielding to fate, he is only a faded representation of what Richard, without his touch of genius, might have been as an old man. Even in his furious demand for his son's death as a pledge of his loyalty to Bolingbroke—a scene which is quite unworthy of Shakespeare—he is another image of the excess into which weakness of will is so often betrayed. His haste, his fury, his exaggerated defiance of natural feeling—how could a father ask the King to slay his son?—are nothing more than weakness desperately trying to convince itself that it is strong, a condition of soul into which Richard falls again and again. His loyalty, which is his religion, is first broken down by the iniquity of the King, yet in principle is retained. Then circumstance

steals even his principle away, and he joins Bolingbroke. Then he recovers his principle by transferring his loyalty to Bolingbroke. In a word, he is a very old man, and his words and acts are carefully studied from weak old age. The sketch may well be contrasted with that of Gaunt, who is as old a man, but who has not lost his will, his power, or his courage. He stays but a short time, only in two scenes, but we see him as if he were alive before us; one of the old school of Edward III.; chivalrous, honourable, fit for the works and the trials of war, as fit as Richard was unfit for them; of deep experience in life, yet tender; rigid in justice even to blaming the King; honouring his own caste, yet loving the people; knowing his duties to them and pressing those duties on the King; loving his son, yet loving England more. Old and with the trembling angers of age, as well as its sorrows; old and dying, but never truer, more valiant, more patriotic, and more sorrowful than in death.

As we stand by his deathbed, we see the trouble of the land and presage the doom of Richard. It is part of Shakespeare's preparation for his catastrophe. That preparation has already begun in the first scene of the first act. The murder of Gloucester, Richard's uncle, underlies the challenges of Mowbray and Bolingbroke, and also the policy of Richard towards the challengers. That murder was planned by Richard and executed by Mowbray before the play begins. It is now Richard's policy to exile his tool Mowbray, and then to exile Bolingbroke. He gets rid of his accomplice in the murder, and also of the man whom he suspects as its avenger. Bolingbroke, when he challenges Mowbray, has really attacked Richard for the murder, and the King fears for his crown. This fear is deepened by Bolingbroke's courtship of the common people.

How he did seem to dive into their hearts  
 With humble and familiar courtesy,  
 What reverence he did throw away on slaves,  
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles  
 And patient underbearing of his fortune,  
 As 'twere to banish their affects with him.  
 Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench ;  
 A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,  
 And had the tribute of his supple knee,  
 With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends' ;  
 As were our England in reversion his,  
 And he our subjects' next degree in hope.

It is a fine sketch of an ambitious politician, as fine as that of Absalom in the Book of Samuel; and the sketch is as admirably finished on the same lines in the rest of the play.

The first and third scenes, with all the pomp and circumstance of court, and tournament, and procession—artistic delight in which is part of the character of Richard—are one long preparation, not only for the overthrow of the King and his death, but seem by their length to be the stately introduction to a greater drama than this single play; to the vast drama of which I have spoken which culminates in the doom of Richard III. and the pacification of tortured England under Henry VII.

Every one has said that Richard is a study of weakness of character. But the study is much more complicated than that easy statement would infer. The character of Richard, as freshly conceived by Shakespeare, is originally gentle, good because untempted, imaginative, loving. He is a fantastic, careless dilettant of life, luxurious by nature, easily excited, easily depressed, weak of will, of conscience, and of reason. As long as he was in a private gentleman's position, and when he first was King, before he fell into the hands of flatterers and luxury, his character was inoffensive, nay more, full of easy charm and poetic sensibility; his weakness did then no harm;

his vanity amused but did not injure the state; his slight touch of wild genius made him loveable. He is the Queen's 'sweet Richard,' her 'sweet guest.' But when he becomes a king, he is tempted by power he thinks irresponsible, and by a horde of parasites who play on his idea of himself and his position till he thinks he is lord of the world. And then, his love of luxury, his weakness and light vanity make him their victims. All his good qualities, for the time, are overwhelmed.

Vanity with a strong character does not destroy good sense or clear sight of affairs, but combined with a weak character and a luxurious life, it rots away, 'insatiate cormorant,' the sense which handles daily life, preys upon itself, and blinds its victim's eyes to events and men. It is no wonder, then, that Richard, now made vain, weak, luxurious—a king, as he thinks, by the decree of God Himself—should be blind to the danger of exiling Bolingbroke and to the strength of Bolingbroke. Shakespeare marks this total blindness, and while we feel, as we read, the folly in Richard of which it is the result, we also feel, as Shakespeare desires us to feel, the piteousness of it. It is impossible to see that lonely figure, ignorant that he has alienated every friend, starting for Ireland, without some dim compassion for his inevitable doom. Even in this far-off way Shakespeare prepares us for the pity we shall hereafter give him.

But it is difficult to give him any pity now. For his 'rash, fierce blaze of riot' has made him insolent. That insolence against law and man and the gods, which the Greeks put into a doomed man, reaches a hateful height in Richard, and is the more hateful because he is young. It is shown when, consulting with Bagot and Green, he lightly says that he will farm all England out and give blank charters to his substitutes that they may wring gold from all classes, without one thought of the civic.

guilt and mortal danger of this act; still more shown when, indignantly reprov'd by Gaunt for this iniquity, he violates the decencies of life by mocking and abusing a dying old man who is of as royal blood as himself; who is dignified by his age; whom he should honour as the stay of his kingdom; and to whom his pity is due because he has parted him from the son of his old age. His outburst of wrath at Gaunt's rebuke is vile. It is said, however, in anger, but his words before he goes to see Gaunt are said without passion, in the cold indifference which belongs to a lawless life, and they are viler still—

Now, put it, God, in his physician's mind  
To help him to his grave immediately !

This insolence, rooted in the weakness he thinks strength, has neither courtesy, reverence, nor compassion. It is doubled, with an equal ignorance of the danger he incurs, when, with a breath, he seizes all the goods and revenues of which his uncle dies possessed, and disinherits Bolingbroke. This is the insolence of a fool who thinks he can violate all civil and moral law with impunity, because he is a king. But above kings are the gods.

And Shakespeare represents their action. York, Richard's best support, is shaken to the centre of his loyalty. In a noble speech he appeals to Richard not to be unworthy of his great ancestors, and Richard, blind and doomed, buoyed up by the luxurious insolence in him, only says—

Why, uncle, what 's the matter ?

York tells him that in seizing on Bolingbroke's succession, he is endangering his own; 'you pluck,' he says to the King, 'a thousand dangers on your head.' 'Think what you will,' cries Richard—

we seize into our hands  
His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands.



With that, he leaves for Ireland; and Shakespeare ends the scene by deepening our sense of the loneliness of the King and of his certain doom, as we listen to the talk of the nobles—Northumberland, Ross, and Willoby—who are left on the stage. With such a king there is no certainty in property or law. He has attacked their whole Order in attacking one. Moreover, he has pilled the commons, and his flatterers devour, like caterpillars, the state. 'Let us go to Bolingbroke,' they cry, 'he will redeem the crown from pawn.'

The next scene doubles the same impression. The Queen, in Shakespeare's mystic way, feels beforehand the coming trouble—

Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,  
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul  
With nothing trembles; at some thing it grieves  
More than with parting from my lord the King.

And Shakespeare is so interested in this experience of presentiment, that he analyses it in a long conversation. Green breaks in on this quiet scene with the dreadful news of Bolingbroke's arrival, of all the great lords who have gathered to his standard. York follows, crying treason, but conscious of his inability to meet it. The weakness of his character, in which Shakespeare makes a fresh sketch of the weakness which is so great a part of his subject, appears in every speech. 'I know not what to do,' he cries. 'The King is my kinsman and my king. Bolingbroke is also my kinsman, and he is wronged. I am torn between them.'

Then Bushy, Green, and Bagot, the king's flatterers, are left alone. They know their doom is at hand. They bid farewell; farewell for ever. All is over. The first division of the play is done. The rest is the working out of Richard's ruin. The reader sees the ruin as if

it were already accomplished; and then, so vivid is its presentation, he also sees, in his mind's eye, the lonely figure of Richard, far away in Ireland, vaguely wandering; who, unconscious of what he has done, is coming back to death; scarcely one friend left in England, and the only lovers of his person flying for their lives; York, his regent, wavering in loyalty, his queen in sad retirement—a blind pathetic figure on whom the shadow of fate lies dark and deep. Even when he is not on the stage his solitary figure thus dominates the play.

In these early historical plays, Shakespeare, clinging too much to history, does not weave his characters so closely and so dramatically into one another as he does afterwards. Richard II. and Richard III. stand, for the most part, apart from and above the rest, and develop almost independently of the other characters. Nor are the secondary characters less isolated from the play of other characters upon them. In this play Bolingbroke is himself alone, so is York, so is Northumberland, so is the Queen. Only Gaunt is inwoven with the others, in reciprocating thought and action. It seems as if Shakespeare at first felt, as he read his history, that the personal character of a king or a great noble was everything in those times; that it made or marred a state. And he drew that fact into its conclusions in the two Richard plays. But, as he went on thinking, he felt that this could not be quite true. Men were not really so isolated from their fellows. Their character was not only developed by events, but by their clash with other men or women. And he changed his method. In *Henry IV.*, in *Henry V.*, in *King John*, and afterwards in the Roman history plays, the leading characters are closely influenced by, and inwoven with, other characters. And the result is that each character, unlike Richard II. or Richard III., becomes more various, more complex, more than it

originally knew itself to be; not the impersonation of one passion, one vice, or one goodness, but also the presentation of the infinite variety which lies hid in each personality; of the unexpected elements which appear, to our surprise, in men and women whom we think we know, at the touch of new events, at the touch of other characters than their own.

That was a great change in the dramatic development of Shakespeare as a writer of historical plays. I say of historical plays, because he had already reached this point in preceding plays not on historical subjects, as, for example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, where all the characters, down to the Nurse, so act and react on one another that fresh evolution continually takes place in each character. It was this which Shakespeare added to the historical plays which followed *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* The lonely dominance of a single character is no longer to be found, except, perhaps, but greatly modified, especially by his close relation to his mother, in *Coriolanus*.

When we meet Richard next, on his return from Ireland, he is a doomed man, brought face to face with the inevitable results of his folly. No change is wrought as yet in his conceit of kingship or in his weakness. But a twofold change has been wrought in him by the sorrow and dismay of the overthrow which has whirled him from the top to the bottom of the world. The first change is that the insolence, the rudeness, the riotous thoughtlessness, the blindness and folly, which marked him in the first scenes, begin to vanish away. The real amiability, gentleness, sentimentality, affectionateness of the man appear—those qualities for which he was loved by the Queen and his friends. The 'sweet guest,' 'the sweet Richard,' of the Queen takes shape. We see what he would have been, had he never been a king, never been

spoilt by the unlimited power which was too greatly charged with temptation for his native weakness to resist.

This change is common in similar circumstances. But the second change is uncommon, and illustrates Shakespeare's desire to carry Richard's character into variety, to give it originality. He adds poetic passion to the King. The shock has awakened in Richard the imagination and passion which his comfortable luxury had kept in slumber. Yet, the weakness of his nature prevents the poetry Shakespeare has put into his mouth from being great. It is half-frenzied, crying like a lost child, wild with self-pity, loose and vagrant in thought, ineffectual with rage and pride; but it is alive with images, with a constant stream of ideas, with rapid changes, and is frequently conducted by the logic of the imagination to a finished close, as in the passage on page 88. This is an amazing change from the Richard who presides over the duel, or stands by the deathbed of Gaunt, and it makes him profoundly interesting. We give him now the admiration and sympathy which we give to an imperfect genius, however weak may be his will. He is now outside the common herd of kings, and enters the royal realm of art; most like some wild poet who has a natural weakness of character which prevents excellence, and whom sore trouble of his own making besets; out of which trouble he draws the subjects and the bewildered wailing of his verse.

A third change, a moral change, is afterwards represented—so full of ideas is Shakespeare, so attached to Richard's character. The poetic power of the King continues to the end, but it loses its wildness, because his character loses its weakness. Shakespeare lifts, as we shall see, Richard's character above itself. But this moral change has not yet taken place, only the first two changes already mentioned. The King's weakness still remains, though his imagination has awakened. And one idea of

his prideful past clings closely to him, till it is beaten out of him by successive blows—his sense of the divinity of kingship. ‘England herself,’ he cries, ‘her very soil and flowers, her animals, her stones, must take their part against rebellion’;

This earth shall have a feeling and these stones  
Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king  
Shall falter under foul rebellion’s arms.

Nay, God Himself is on the side of anointed kings—

Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king ;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.  
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press’d  
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,  
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
A glorious angel.

So high he flies in the weakness of pride. The next moment, with equal weakness, he is hopeless; hearing from Salisbury that his Welsh army has abandoned him. The next moment, spurred by Aumerle’s reproach—

Comfort, my liege, remember who you are ;

he flies as high as before

Awake, thou sluggard majesty ! Thou sleepest.  
Is not the king’s name twenty thousand names ?  
Arm, arm, my name ! A puny subject strikes  
At thy great glory. Look not to the ground,  
Ye favourites of a king : are we not high ?  
High be our thoughts :

Fine words, to which Sir Stephen Scroop brings news of dire calamity. Then Richard, plunged again into despondency, unloads his weakness in a flux of words. I quote them; they prove that he has realised at last his folly in the past, his weakness in the present. They prove more—they prove that the imaginative poetic element, the dreamy sentiment of his real nature, has now taken command. He is henceforward the reflective

poet of many words; never the man of action, never the man with an aim, never Bolingbroke.

Of comfort no man speak :

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs ;  
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes  
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth ;  
 Let's choose executors and talk of wills :  
 And yet not so—for what can we bequeath  
 Save our deposed bodies to the ground ?  
 Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,  
 And nothing can we call our own but death,  
 And that small model of the barren earth  
 Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.  
 For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings :  
 How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,  
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd,  
 Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd ;  
 All murder'd ; for within the hollow crown  
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
 Keeps Death his court, and there the antick sits,  
 Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp ;  
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,  
 To monarchise, be fear'd, and kill with looks,  
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit  
 As if this flesh which walls about our life  
 Were brass impregnable ; and humour'd thus  
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin  
 Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king !  
 Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood  
 With solemn reverence : throw away respect,  
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,  
 For you have but mistook me all this while :  
 I live with bread like you, feel want,  
 Taste grief, need friends : subjected thus,  
 How can you say to me I am a king ?

Carlisle, Aumerle, urge him to deeds on hearing this. And he lifts his heart again. For the moment the ague-fit of fear is overblown. But, when he hears that his uncle York is gone over to the foe, it is the final blow. The up-and-down of his bewildered passion has passed away. Despair is now his only bedfellow.

Over against this excited and wavering man is set the

cool, steadfast man, with the single aim. Bolingbroke wins the day, but he is not the protagonist of the play. His presence, now that he is again brought face to face with Richard, is used by Shakespeare, not so much to display his character, as to expand the wild, feeble, sentimental character of the King.

We have met Bolingbroke twice before; in the scene between him and Mowbray, and in the scene where he is exiled. In the first he is loud-voiced, somewhat of a blusterer, without the politic courtesy of his after manners. But he may have exaggerated his attack on Mowbray in order to conceal from the crowd what his words really meant—a veiled attack on the King, through Mowbray, for the murder of Gloucester. Mowbray blusters also, but it is the bluster of guilt, side-glancing also at the King, who has with him plotted the murder.

In the second scene Bolingbroke is quite different, quite self-contained. He speaks to the King whom he despises with covert sarcasm. At heart he is vengeful for Gloucester's death, angry with himself, sorry for his father, indignant with the King's treatment of England—but nothing of these passions appears without. The needs of the hour control his soul; and his thirst for power is curbed into waiting. He is content to believe in himself and his fate.— Exiled, he knows he will return, though exile galls him to the core.— He listens quietly to his father who, out of his long-experience, and in the coldness of old age, tries to convince him that exile is nothing to the philosophic man—'Think you are not exiled, and you are not.' But Bolingbroke, as unimaginative as Richard is imaginative, who knows what he is, where he is, and what he means, with absolute clearness, disperses the old man's unreality. Exile not exile by thinking it is not!

O! who can hold a fire in his hand  
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?

Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite  
 By bare imagination of a feast?  
 Or wallow naked in December snow  
 By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?  
 O, no! the apprehension of the good  
 Gives but the greater feeling to the worse.

A full revelation of his practical, clear-sighted, steady character. 'Let me come home to plain fact,' it seems to say; and then we know that Richard, who never sees the facts around him, will be broken to pieces when he meets Bolingbroke.<sup>1</sup>

He meets him now. Bolingbroke, playing his politic game, making no step forward till he has secured his last, luring by a gracious humility Northumberland, York, Percy, to his side, all things to all men, hiding his determined aim to gain the crown, sends a humble message to Richard. 'On both my knees I kiss King Richard's hand. Only to win back my lands, to reverse my banishment am I come.' Yet, in the midst of these meek words, a certain fury once breaks out, born of the wrath and fixed purpose that he hides beneath them—a subtle touch of Shakespeare's—

If not, I'll use the advantage of my power,  
 And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood  
 Rain'd from the wounds of slaughter'd Englishmen.

Northumberland bears this message to the King upon the castle wall. Shakespeare, to lift us into pity, makes Richard look like a king; his eye, like an eagle's, 'lightens forth controlling majesty'; and this pity gathers closely

<sup>1</sup> It is worth saying that Shakespeare makes the patriotism of the father descend to the son. Bolingbroke ends the scene in this way—

Then, England's ground, farewell; sweet soil adieu;  
 My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet!

Nor is Richard less fond of his country. When he lands from Ireland he cries—

I weep for joy  
 To stand upon my kingdom once again;  
 Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand.



round him from this moment; accompanies him to London, to Pomfret, to his death. We forgive the past for the sake of the piteous present. Insolent majesty we resented, but compassion waits on ruined majesty.

What is most pathetic in the castle scene is the inability of its passion. Richard unloads his heart in fluent feebleness till we are touched with contempt. But the contempt is lessened by the imagination in his words. How sensitive they are, every tense nerve thrilling through them; how full of pitiful, half-frantic poetry! He stands at first on his divine right as king. God omnipotent will be his avenger; then he cries that his England will be devastated; her maid-pale peace be changed to scarlet indignation—and in the prophecy Shakespeare means us to presage the Civil Wars which Henry's usurpation will begin. From this high cry he falls, bending to Bolingbroke's desire, and, having yielded, regrets his shame with bitter passion—

O God! O God! that e'er this tongue of mine,  
That laid the sentence of dread banishment  
On yond proud man, should take it off again  
With words of sooth. O! that I were as great  
As is my grief, or lesser than my name,  
Or that I could forget what I have been,  
Or not remember what I must be now.  
Swell'st thou, proud heart?

He sees Bolingbroke draw near, and the wild, imaginative self-pity, indignation, and fear of what will be, breaks into a storm of self-revealing words—

What must the king do now? Must he submit?  
The king shall do it: must he be depos'd?  
The king shall be contented: must he lose  
The name of king? o' God's name, let it go:  
I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,  
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,  
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,  
My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,  
My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,

My subjects for a pair of carved saints,  
 And my large kingdom for a little grave,  
 A little little grave, an obscure grave ;  
 Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,  
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet  
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head ;  
 For on my heart they tread now whilst I live ;  
 And buried once, why not upon my head ?  
 Aumerle, thou weep'st, my tender-hearted cousin !  
 We'll make foul weather with despised tears ;  
 Our sighs and they shall lodge the summer corn,  
 And make a dearth in this revolting land.  
 Or shall we play the wantons with our woes,  
 And make some pretty match with shedding tears ?  
 As thus ; to drop them still upon one place,  
 Till they have fretted us a pair of graves  
 Within the earth ; and, therein laid : 'There lies  
 Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes.'  
 Would not this ill do well ? Well, well, I see  
 I talk but idly and you laugh at me.

Exhausted by this ebb and flow of passion, but having freed his soul by it, he meets Bolingbroke with the dignity a doomed man borrows from the belief that all is over, with the sarcasm and the courage which are born in a weak man when he feels that the worst has come ; and passes, at Bolingbroke's command, to London.

This to and fro of excitement and depression, soaring and sinking,—and behind it Richard's amazed self-pity, and behind that, our deep pity felt through Shakespeare's pity for one so inevitably mauled by moral law, touched too into sombre colour by our half-contempt for him, and into wild, delicate, sunset colour by our sympathy with his fantastic imagination—are, in this wonderful series of passages, as penetrating, as pathetic as any in the work of Shakespeare.

The act ends with that gentle scene in the Duke of York's garden, where the Queen and her ladies come to breathe the air. It is Shakespeare's dramatic way, after the turmoil and the tempest, to place us in a quiet place, and in quiet thought. It is, he thinks, the way of human

life to do so with us. But he does not leave in it his subject. Rather, he resumes the whole of the previous action of the play, and anticipates its close, in the allegory the gardener makes. The garden is England. The gardener is the King; the fruit-trees are the nobles; the herbs and flowers the people; and the weeds and caterpillars those who devour the state. The gardener and his aids, in their walled quiet, discuss what is good government, and what is not; that is, they discuss that which forms one of the underlying motives of the play itself, and of the whole series of plays down to the close of *Richard III.* And admirably it is done. The serious, philosophic talk of the gardener is set with natural art between the pretty interchange of thought of the Queen and her ladies and the sorrowful break from her ambuscade of the Queen when she hears the gardener blame the King—

O! I am press'd to death through want of speaking.

What, thought Shakespeare, are kings and queens and the quarrels of great nobles to this honest quiet workman who does with vital interest the work he enjoys, who has no foolish resentment against the great folk, even when they abuse him! Nothing but pity stirs his heart.<sup>1</sup> With a delicate sympathy for the Queen and the woman, with the reflective sentiment of one who lives far away from the world, he plants in her memory a bed of herbs whose nature will recall her sorrow and her fate. The lines are exquisitely fitted to the case, the scene, and the man—

Poor queen! so that thy state might be no worse,  
 I would my skill were subject to thy curse.  
 Here did she fall a tear; here, in this place,  
 I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace;  
 Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,  
 In the remembrance of a weeping queen.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be well to compare this passage with the scene in Sir Walter Scott's *Abbot* between Mary of Scotland and the gardener of Blinkhoolie, who has been, in old days, the Abbot of St. Mary's. The one is as much a piece of genius as the other.

The scene at the beginning of the fourth act in Westminster Hall seems needless, a drag on the movement of the play. The only excuses I can find for it are, first, that it forms an introduction to the entrance of King Richard who is the centre of interest; and secondly, that it reveals those elements of disturbance, lying underneath the seeming peace of the usurpation, which in the succeeding plays bring about the Civil Wars. It is filled with the violent quarrels and fierce speech of hot-headed nobles. We anticipate, as we hear them, rebellion and battle. And this anticipation is enforced by the Bishop of Carlisle, who, indignant at Richard's deposition as violating the divine right of kings, foretells the Civil Wars in a speech which is remembered in *Henry IV.*, when the king draws near to death. The deposition of Richard is the source of the doom that overshadows the following plays. If you crown Bolingbroke, says the Bishop—

let me prophesy,  
 The blood of English shall manure the ground  
 And future ages groan for this foul act;  
 Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,  
 And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars  
 Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;  
 Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny  
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd  
 The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.  
 O! if you raise this house against this house,  
 It will the woofullest division prove  
 That ever fell upon this cursed earth.  
 Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,  
 Lest child, child's children cry against you 'woe!'

It is a passage which suggests that Shakespeare had already conceived the whole series as one drama.

Then the King enters. Shakespeare has evidently spent so much trouble over this scene that he has overdone his work. He has introduced that spectacular scene with the mirror which is quite unnecessary, which

sins against the 'Not too much,' and which, worst of all, not only lowers our pity for Richard because it exhibits his theatrical folly in public, but also degrades the character of Bolingbroke below the level it keeps in the rest of the play. In permitting this antic of Richard, Bolingbroke lays him open to a cruel mockery which his terrible sorrow neither deserves nor ought to have. I wonder Shakespeare's exquisite delicacy towards human nature could have permitted it. Nor is it the only stain on the scene. Shakespeare should have felt that Northumberland's demand that the king, round whom the compassion of all gentle folk should gather, must read out, and sign the record of, all his crimes and follies, was a brutal demand. It is also needless for the dramatic action, and, if it be done to increase the pity for Richard which ought to preside over the scene, is a clumsy way of doing this. There is pity enough. It needs no false heightening. There is more of pathos in this short phrase of Richard's than in all these tricks (from whatever source they were borrowed) to make it keener,

- BOL. I thought you had been willing to resign.  
 K. RICH. My crown, I am ; but still my griefs are mine.  
 You may my glories and my state depose,  
 But not my griefs ; still am I king of those.

It is enough. The words with which afterwards Richard pours out his anger, his misery, are weaker than these. He is, throughout the scene, like a wild animal trapped in the wood, and crying in the night, while the free beasts pass him by and mock at his distress. The scene is piteous; yet we may wish it had been shorter, and less sensational.

The fifth act now begins, and closes all. The last stroke of fate falls on the King; and his death is the first stroke of a new fate which broods over Bolingbroke, and the work of which is wrought out through the two parts

of *Henry IV.* The murder of Richard, the blood of every noble, slaughtered to clear the path of Bolingbroke to the throne, cry for vengeance. The dragon's seed is sown. It springs up finally into the armed men of the Civil War, when father slew the son and son the father. Richard, in the hour of his doom, sees the beginning of this and prophesies it to Northumberland. Again Shakespeare seems careful to prepare us for what is coming in *Henry IV.*; seems as if he already looked forward to the large design of which we have spoken.

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal  
 The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,  
 The time shall not be many hours of age  
 More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head  
 Shall break into corruption. Thou shalt think,  
 Though he divide the realm and give thee half,  
 It is too little, helping him to all ;  
 And he shall think that thou, which know'st the way  
 To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,  
 Being ne'er so little urg'd, another way  
 To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.  
 The love of wicked friends converts to fear ;  
 That fear to hate, and hate turns one or both  
 To worthy danger, and deserved death.

Another preparation for *Henry IV.* is also in this act (Sc. iii.). It is the short talk between Percy and Bolingbroke about him who is the Prince of Wales in *Henry IV.* The dissolute, unthrifty, wanton boy who lives with Falstaff is sketched for us, and then his higher future in *Henry V.* 'I see,' says his father—

As dissolute as desperate ; yet, through both,  
 I see some sparkles of a better hope, which elder days  
 May happily bring forth.

I wonder, when I read these preparation passages, whether Shakespeare, who was so careful in his art, did not insert them in this play after he had written *Henry IV.*

One word must be said about the second and third scenes, in which York plays so curious a part. The

second is, of course, remarkable for the fine and well-known description of Bolingbroke riding into London. It serves to lift the figure of Richard into even a higher realm of pity. But the third, where York begs the death of his own son from the King, offends the natural instinct of the heart, and is one of the few examples of this in Shakespeare; and though the scene, where Aumerle, York, and the Duchess rush one after another into the closet of the King, may be a good piece of stage effect, it is all the worse for that. It troubles with mere sensationalism the solemn atmosphere of fate which hangs over the death of Richard.

We now come to the representation of Richard in this final act, which opens with his meeting the Queen on his way to the Tower. We read the scene, and are at first amazed. This is not the Richard whom we have known. He is all changed. Shakespeare, who has conceived Richard's original character as of good and loving stuff underneath his native weakness, the Queen's 'fair rose and map of honour,' the 'beauteous inn where no hard-favoured grief should lodge'; who had then represented his weakness as rising, through irresponsible power and luxury, over the goodness and love into vanity, blindness, and insolence; who had then, by terrible misfortune's siege, made him, while he retained his weakness, and indeed through his weakness, into the semblance of a fantastic poet, has now made a further change. He felt that Richard, since he was originally good, since he was betrayed by weakness of will but not by native viciousness into his faults, could not pass through so fierce a torrent of sorrow and misfortune without losing what was base and weak in him, and recovering whatever might be noble and strong. He is purged of his weakness. He is purged of his selfishness. He is purged of his blindness. He is purged of his insolentia. He speaks no longer with

a flux of words. All he says is brief and clear. He sees with equal steadiness the past, the present, and the future. His love is no longer a feeble sentiment. The parting with his Queen is marked by strength and self-control deeply set in love, and with the wisdom of death in every word. He knows he is the victim of Fate, and he knows why—

Join not with grief, fair woman, do not so,  
To make my end too sudden : learn, good soul,  
To think our former state a happy dream ;  
From which awak'd, the truth of what we are  
Shows us but this. I am sworn brother, sweet,  
To grim Necessity, and he and I  
Will keep a league till death.

Can any words, any temper, be more unlike his previous words and temper? He is quite clear as to what the Queen should do; and sets her in the way to do it, briefly and fully. When the Queen, seeing he is changed, and mistaking his brave acceptance of the inevitable, urges him to fierceness :

What ! is my Richard both in shape and mind  
Transform'd and weakened ? Hath Bolingbroke deposed  
Thine intellect ? hath he been in thy heart ?  
The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw  
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage  
To be o'erpowered ;

he answers, out of the grave atmosphere of death which wraps him so closely, in quiet words, full of peace and beauty. All that was weak and foolish has passed away, but his lovingness is deepened by the change. His parting words are lovely with tenderness and sweet remembrance.

Nor does Shakespeare, in that last scene in the dungeon, where the murder is wrought, make him lower than this. His long soliloquy is not only descriptive of the place where he sits—Shakespeare never omits to paint for the intellectual eye his scenery—it is, in its gentle philosophy, its sensitive ear, its poetic symbolism, its love of music, and its kindly irony, not un-



worthy of a man, and of a man in the very shadow of death; and its close is beautiful with pathetic and lonely passion. The music which at first he loved, now maddens him; he bids it cease—yet—

Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me !  
For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard  
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world.

The tender, pathetic cry of this is deepened when, on a sudden, the groom enters and tells how his heart yearned when he saw Bolingbroke ride on roan Barbary, Richard's favourite—

Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend,  
How went he under him?

It is only Shakespeare and Walter Scott who are capable of these divine things. At this, and while Richard is lost in recollection, the murderers break in, and all is over. Richard dies sword in hand,

As full of valour as of royal blood.

The work of justice is done; the punishment of ill government exacted; the fatal result of weakness, when strength was needed, reached; and pity alone remains, and the sorrowful tale to move the hearts of men. Richard himself bequeaths that legacy; and no better close can be given to all we have passed through than his own words, as lovely as they are sad and grave—

Good sometime queen, prepare thee hence for France,  
Think I am dead, and that even here thou tak'st,  
As from my death-bed, my last living leave.  
In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire  
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales  
Of woeful ages, long ago betid :  
And ere thou bid good-night, to quit their grief,  
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,  
And send the hearers weeping to their beds :  
For why the senseless brands will sympathise  
The heavy accent of thy moving tongue,  
And in compassion weep the fire out ;  
And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,  
For the deposing of a rightful king.

## IV

### RICHARD III

*Richard III.* completes the vast drama, carried on through eight plays, which was begun in *Richard II.* It is, as it were, the fifth act, the winding up of the varied threads of the action of ninety years, the coming home to roost of all their curses, hatreds, and crimes, the accomplishment of the work of avenging Justice, and, in Richmond's victory, the initiation of a new England, purged from guilt.

In *Richard III.*, then, the long tragedy is closed. It brings to death those who, having torn the heart out of their country, have tried to govern England for their own advance, and sacrificed to that the welfare of the people. Richard's figure embodies all the civil evil in himself. He is it, incarnate; and he dominates the play. Over against him, and towering, is Margaret, who is the embodied Destiny of the play. Her worn and wasted figure hovers above it like a bird of doom. Her curse pervades its atmosphere and enters into all its action. One by one the guilty—Clarence, Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Buckingham, all save Richard; one by one the innocent—the two boy-princes, Anne, Elizabeth, are forced to feel her presence in the hour they meet their fate, and to recognise in her the impersonated vengeance of natural law in the quarrel which has defiled England with fraternal blood. Richard himself is made her avenger in his bloody passage to the throne, and having finished this work, he is himself destroyed by the evil he has

done. Nothing can be finer than this knitting of all the avenging forces round the supernatural image of Margaret, who is herself the prophetess and the victim of Justice. It clasps all the persons and all the action of the play into unity. It incarnates the judgment of moral law.

Within this main purpose of Justice working out the penalties due to those hatreds of great families which in their exercise injure the people—the conception which is at the back of *Romeo and Juliet*—is the final evolution of Richard's character and of his doom. When this play begins that character has been already fully formed. His long soliloquy in the third part of *Henry VI.* (Act III. Sc. ii.) is Shakespeare's sketch of what Richard is when the new drama opens. The passion at the root of him is, like Macbeth's, ambition for the crown, with tenfold more steadfastness in ambition than Macbeth possessed. Macbeth's ambition does not deliberately premeditate the murder of Duncan. It may have occurred to him at intervals, but it is only a sudden opportunity which lures him into it. When he is in it, he debates the crime, hesitates, fears, thinks of his honour, is imaginative with dark superstition. None of these things touch Richard. He plots all his murders beforehand with a certain joy, with unblenching resolution. He has no hesitation, nor does he debate with his honour, conscience, fear, or affection. He condemns his brothers as well as his enemies. Every means to his aim is right. 'Would,' he cries, 'Edward were wasted, marrow, bones, and all,' and Clarence, Henry, and young Edward dead. They are in my way, they shall be cleared away. What other pleasure in the world but sovereignty is there for me? Love? Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb. Therefore 'I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown.' Shall I attain it with all those lives between it and me?

And I, like one lost in a thorny wood,  
 That rents the thorns and is rent with the thorns,  
 Seeking a way and straying from the way ;  
 Not knowing how to find the open air,  
 But toiling desperately to find it out,  
 Torment myself to catch the English crown :  
 And from that torment I will free myself,  
 Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.  
 Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,  
 And cry, 'Content,' to that which grieves my heart,  
 And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,  
 And frame my face to all occasions.  
 I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall ;  
 I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk ;  
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,  
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.  
 I can add colours to the chameleon,  
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,  
 And set the murd'rous Machiavel to school.  
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown ?  
 Tut ! were it further off, I'll pluck it down.

Fierce ambition, cold cunning, finished hypocrisy, ruthless murder, conscienceless resolve—these are his powers. And he keeps his word. He stabs Prince Edward after the battle with a savage scoff—

Sprawl'st thou ! take that, to end thine agony.

When the others after Tewksbury are talking, he has ridden from the field to London, entered the Tower, and slain King Henry, mocking and rejoicing. And over the dead body of the King he plans the murder of his brother Clarence—

Clarence, thy turn is next, and then the rest,  
 Counting myself but bad till I be best.

A masterful person whose iron will makes and leads events ! He is, on the contrary, the servant of Justice, and Shakespeare rarely did a closer piece of work than when, without any special insisting on this, he makes us conscious of it. Richard thinks he makes and guides the storm in which so many lives are shipwrecked. He is

really the chief victim of the storm, driven from shoal to shoal, till he is wrecked inevitably.

But the most remarkable thing in his character, as Shakespeare conceived it, is that he is devoid of the least emotion of love. Not one trace of it exists, and it places him outside of humanity. It is not the absence of conscience which is at the root of his evil. Of course, he who has no love has no true sense of right and wrong, and the absence of conscience in Richard is rooted in the absence of love in him. The source of all his crime is the unmodified presence of self alone. As he stabs Henry, he cries—

Down, down to hell ; and say, I sent thee thither,  
I, that have neither pity, love, nor fear.

This creation of a character absolutely devoid of love is deliberately done by Shakespeare. The Richard of the original play of *Henry VI.* is not without some power or grace of love. Ambition for the crown is also the leading element in this Richard's character; these lines which must be Marlowe's tell us that;

And, father, do but think  
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown ;  
Within whose circuit is Elysium,  
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.

But such an ambition would not alone make him the monster he is in *Richard III.*—a man incapable of love. It does not: he feels a passionate grief when he thinks that his father is dead. He has no joy till he hears he is alive. His very revenge is coloured by love: it is the wrath of affection. What feeling of love this earlier Richard has is natural, wholly unlike the semblance of it which Shakespeare puts upon the lips of the Richard of this play, who himself mocks at the words of love which he uses. Nor do we see anything

in the original Richard of the mask of hypocrisy our Richard wears; nothing of the intellectual power, the mastery of guile, the love of guile for its own sake, the chuckling pleasure in his cunning, the deliberate contempt of God and man, the deliberate self-contempt, the deep scorn of women because they loved, the pitilessness, the self-isolation—all of which Shakespeare has added to the Richard of this play; and none of which could have been so complete, so unmodified, if any touch of love had belonged to his character.

This is a unique attempt in Shakespeare's work. Richard is entirely isolated by this absence of love from humanity. He is deprived even of a great number of the passions—all those which are derived from love or opposed to love. Richard has no good passions, but neither has he the evil passions of hatred, envy, or jealousy. Any passion that he has—if the word passion may justly be applied to ambition—is the servant of his intellect. Of course, without love, and the qualities that depend on it, he has no conscience, no repentance, no fear of God. What seems at times remorse in him at the end is the agony of failure, is fury at the breaking down of his intellectual power. When a sense of the existence of conscience occurs to him, it intrudes in dreams only, not in real life. Awake, he passes from one crime to another without one touch of emotion, without one moment of morality.

This separates him even from Iago, whose malignity is partly accounted for, who at least attempts to account for his curious, self-gratulating pleasure in torturing Othello by pretending jealousy. This also accounts for the unhesitating swiftness with which crime follows crime in Richard's course, which otherwise would be unnatural. Macbeth before Duncan's murder is not half so rapid. The sense of honour which serves Macbeth for conscience

makes him pause again and again before the murder, but Richard never hesitates. Old affections, admiration for Duncan's character, the chieftain's sense of honour, hinder Macbeth's quickness in guilt. Macbeth has some love in his heart; he loves his wife; he would not have murdered Clarence nor rejoiced when Edward died. He was naturally full of the milk of human-kindness of which Richard had not one drop. When he acts swiftly, and he is hurried by his love for his wife as well as by his ambition, his haste is lest his sense of honour, of which he is always conscious, should get the better of him. It is only when he has realised that honour is irrevocably violated that he becomes the reckless murderer. Guilt is not his natural element, because he is not mere intellect unbalanced by any affection. One with Richard in ambition, he differs from him by the presence of love in his nature. Richard is loveless intellect, ambitious of unchallenged power—absolute self with cunning—an awful solitary.

Shakespeare felt obliged to account for this supernatural devilry in man; and he does so by making Richard a monster from his mother's womb.

At his birth Nature rebelled;

The owl shriek'd at thy birth, an evil sign;  
The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;  
Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempests shook down trees!  
The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top,  
And chattering pies in dismal discord sung.  
Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,  
And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope;  
To wit, an indigest deformed lump,  
Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree.

And his mother confirms the tale when she lays her curse upon him. But Shakespeare does not think this enough to motive the unnaturalness of the character. Therefore he further dwells on Richard's belief that all the world hates him for his misshapen person, and that

heaven—the only touch of religion in Richard—has made him in its anger;

Then, since the heavens have shap'd my body so,  
 Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.  
 I have no brother, I am like no brother :  
 And this word 'love,' which grey-beards call divine,  
 Be resident in men like one another  
 And not in me : I am myself alone.

'I am myself alone'; that is the keynote of Richard's character as conceived by Shakespeare; intellect without love, like Goethe's Mephistopheles; and by the absence of love outside of human nature.

Be resident in men like one another,  
 And not in me.

It is this incapacity to even conceive love which makes him try to do things which would seem impossible to any one who loved. No other man could have wooed Lady Anne as he did, or asked Elizabeth for her daughter, yet both are not out of character in one who is wholly ignorant of love.

What though I kill'd her husband and her father,  
 The readiest way to make the wench amend  
 Is to become her husband and her father ;

is a speech incredible on the lips of any one who has ever loved. It is only when he has won Anne that he is astonished; and in the astonishment a faint gleam of belief in the existence of moral right and wrong for others comes upon him. 'She has God,' he says, 'and her conscience against her.' But this only serves to make him proud of his own isolation in lovelessness from other men. His scorn of himself and of others, and the mixture of bitterness, pride, contempt, fierce self-knowledge, and isolation in the long soliloquy which begins

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd ?

is a splendid example of the power by which Shake-



speare felt and shared within himself a thousand others than himself, and even dared, as here, to paint the nature of one who was set aside by him from all mankind.

This is followed by that masterly scene in the palace where Richard, the lord here of politic intellect, puts himself forward as 'the plain man,' and then as 'too soft and pitiful and childishly foolish for the world'; and so sets all his enemies at loggerheads, plays the interests and passions of each against those of the others, and makes use even of Margaret, the foe of all, to develop and win his schemes. His soulless cunning is triumphant, and he has a certain pleasure, even joy, in his devilment, such as we have in the unhindered exercise of any natural force we possess. In his case, however, the force exercised by absolute want of love is an unnatural force; and the result is—that the will and the intellectual cunning which exercise it are finally broken down. It is lovelessness which spoils his cunning, causes him to make mistakes, and finally destroys his aim. Again we get back to the root of his character; he is self alone.

The second idea of the drama comes in (Act. i. Sc. iii.) with the presence of Margaret, the incarnate Fury of the Civil Wars, who has been their incessant urger, and is now the Pythoness of their punishment. 'Small joy have I,' cries Elizabeth, 'in being England's queen.' And Margaret, her first entrance into the action, mutters from the background—

And lessen'd be that small, God, I beseech him.

She is a terrible figure, the Fate and Fury together of the play. She does nothing for its movement; she is outside of that. But she broods above its action, with hands outstretched in cursing. Worn, like 'a wrinkled witch,' her tongue edged with bitter fire, with all the

venom of the Civil Wars bubbling in her heart; grey-haired, tall, with the habit of command, she has not been, like Richard, without love or exiled from human nature. But all she loved are dead. She has outlived humanity, and passed into an elemental Power, hopeless, pitiless, joyless save for the joy of vengeance. It is not till she finds the Duchess of York and Edward's queen sunk in their hopeless pain that she feels herself at one, even for a moment, with any human creature. She sits down and curses with them, but soon leaves them, as one removed; towering over them as she flings back on them her parting curse, incensed that she has been even for that moment at one with their feeble wrath. Her eloquence is that of primeval sorrow and hate. Her curses have the intensity of an immortal's passion.

'O, well skilled in curses,' cries the Queen Elizabeth, 'teach me how to curse.' 'Life is her shame,' Margaret says, but she will not die till she has vengeance. 'Tis the only thing which brings a smile to her withered lips. And her vengeance is felt, like an actual presence in the air, by all who die. Shakespeare takes pains to mark that out. She is not only Margaret and hate to them, but the spirit though whom divine justice works its wrath upon them. And when she sees the end, she passes away, still alive, like one who cannot die; departs in an awful joy—

These English woes will make me smile in France.

Immediately after her first appearance, the curse and punishment begin to act. Richard is left alone on the stage, and the murderers of Clarence enter to receive his command to slay. These are the only persons in the play with whom Richard is at his ease. With murderers he drops his mask. He hails them as if they were comrades;

How now, my hardy, stout-resolved mates !  
 Are you now going to dispatch this thing ?

I like you, lads ; about your business straight ;  
 Go, go, dispatch.

This murder fills the fourth scene. Shakespeare does not expose it unrelieved. He feels that the passion in the last scene has been too loud and furious, as indeed it has. He therefore lowers the note, and introduces, not to lessen but to deepen the tragedy, the wonderful piteousness, the wonderful beauty of the dream of Clarence.

Nevertheless, he does not let loose his main conception. The murder is itself a crime, but it is also part of the great punishment, of the working out of the law that greed produces greed, and the sword the sword. Clarence confesses that his death is morally just.

O God ! if my deep prayers cannot appease thee,  
 And thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,  
 Yet execute thy wrath on me alone.

Immediately, pat on the point, and done in Shakespeare's way of setting over against a grave thought the same thought in a grotesque or ghastly framework, there is now a parody, with a grim earnestness in it, of this same question of the vengeance of conscience. Is there that in us which punishes with thought ? Is there a wrath beyond ourselves ? an imperative command within us ? If so, is it worth regarding ? The murderers debate the question from their rude standpoint, and settle the matter as the robbing and murdering kings and nobles had settled it. They have a warrant for their crime ; it is done on command. But these considerations are indifferent, of these conscience might get the better ; but the reward, the gain—that conquers conscience ; and arguing to and fro with extraordinary variety of base and cunning thought and phrase, they

end by attacking conscience as the most dangerous enemy of states and societies.

SEC. MURD.	'Zounds ! he dies : I had forgot the reward.
FIRST MURD.	Where's thy conscience now ?
SEC. MURD.	In the Duke of Gloucesters's purse.

I'll not meddle with it ; it makes a man a coward ; a man cannot steal, but it accuseth him ; a man cannot swear, but it checks him ; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife, but it detects him ; 'tis a blushing, shamefast spirit, that mutinies in a man's bosom ; it fills one full of obstacles ; it made me once restore a purse of gold that I found ; it beggars any man that keeps it ; it is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing ; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to himself and live without it.

This is exactly Richard's point of view, put coarsely. Yet these two are not as bad as Richard. They do feel the pull of conscience. He could not.

The same elements of division appear in the second act. The hatreds of all parties underlie the hollow reconciliation at the deathbed of the King. Buckingham concentrates the falsehood of them all in his perjurous vow. By that falsehood, as a moral matter, his coming death is accounted for. But Shakespeare, though here in his sternest mood, awakens the pity of the audience by the form in which he casts Buckingham's oath. He prays for the very fate which falls upon him. Whenever Buckingham doth turn his hate (he speaks to the Queen) on you or yours

God punish me  
With hate in those where I expect most love !  
When I have most need to employ a friend,  
And most assured that he is a friend,  
Deep, hollow, treacherous, and full of guile,  
Be he unto me !

And so it falls out. The words make us think of Richard, and Shakespeare answers our thought. 'We only want Gloucester,' says the king,

To make the blessed period of this peace.

He enters, and flings into their false calm, like a shell, the news of the death of Clarence.

Then, Clarence being the first, Edward is the second to feel the judgment which descends on those guilty of the blood of England. His conscience awakens, and he dies, feeling that God's justice is taking hold on men.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's work that the form of Edward's confession (recalling Clarence and his kindness) throws back a new light of pity on the scene of Clarence's death, and keeps up the continuity of the dramatic action and the dramatic pity. And the pity is made almost terrible by the picture Edward's confession contains of the universal selfishness of the court, where not one has thought of Clarence, only of himself.

My brother kill'd no man ; his fault was thought :  
 And yet his punishment was bitter death.  
 Who sued to me for him ? Who, in my wrath,  
 Kneel'd at my feet, and bade me be advis'd ?  
 Who spoke of brotherhood ? Who spoke of love ?  
 Who told me how the poor soul did forsake  
 The mighty Warwick, and did fight for me ?  
 Who told me, in the field at Tewksbury,  
 When Oxford had me down, he rescu'd me,  
 And said, ' Dear brother, live, and be a king ' ?  
 Who told me, when we both lay in the field  
 Frozen almost to death, how he did lap me  
 Even in his garments ; and did give himself,  
 All thin and naked, to the numb cold night ?  
 All this from my remembrance brutish wrath  
 Sinfully pluck'd, and not a man of you  
 Had so much grace to put it in my mind ! . . .

The proudest of you all  
 Have been beholding to him in his life,  
 Yet none of you would once beg for his life.  
 O God ! I fear thy justice will take hold  
 On me and you and mine and yours for this.  
 Come, Hastings, help me to my closet. O ! poor Clarence !

Nor is the main scope of the play lost sight of in the next scene between the boys and their aunt and grandam — a quiet moment in this tempest of crime. The fate of

the young princes is shadowed forth in the talk of their cousins. The fate which overglooms the play is heard in the grief of the women. The gloom is deepened when the Queen enters wailing her husband's death, and she and the Duchess (who, with Margaret, serve the uses, in some sort, of the Greek chorus) toss their sorrow to and fro with the children of Clarence, till the whole world seems full of weeping. Then Gloucester, sheathed in hypocrisy and mocking inwardly the sorrow he has caused, adds poignancy to the tragic pain the audience feels.

The act ends with the arrest by Buckingham and Gloucester of the kinsmen of the Queen. 'Ah me,' she cries, 'I see the ruin of my house'; and then the Duchess, sick even to death of strife and slaughter, gathers together all the woes of the long quarrel as they have touched the house of York.

Accursed and unquiet wrangling days,  
How many of you have mine eyes beheld !  
My husband lost his life to get the crown,  
And often up and down my sons were toss'd,  
For me to joy and weep their gain and loss :  
And being seated, and domestic broils  
Clean over-blown, themselves, the conquerors,  
Make war upon themselves ; brother to brother,  
Blood to blood, self against self : O ! preposterous  
And frantic outrage, end thy damned spleen ;  
Or let me die, to look on death no more.

Amidst an astonishing variety of circumstance and character which the Greek dramatists would have repudiated as injurious to unity, the third act keeps close to the tragic development of the work of Justice. The audience knows what fate hangs over the princes on their arrival in London. It expects to have it presaged. And it is. Touch after touch, in their graceful prattle, awakes our pity. Some are even put into the mouth of Gloucester. The gallant bearing of the prince,

his hopes to be a famous warrior like Cæsar, while his murderer stands by; his misliking of the Tower; the light, peevish, innocent talk of York; his scoff at Gloucester's deformity; the sudden overshadowing of his heart also when he hears of the Tower—all deepen the tragic darkness. And now Richard, having resolved on the murder of the princes, murders all who stand in the way of his design. Yet it is not he who really slays the new victims. It is avenging Justice, wading, as usual, to her conclusion through the blood of the innocent as well as of the guilty. Richard is her blind instrument. Rivers, Grey, Vaughan are now slain, the third, fourth, and fifth after Clarence and Edward who feel the sentence of conscience and the curse of Margaret. Their last words remember her. Next Hastings meets his unexpected fate. While he is talking of Gloucester's friendly face (Shakespeare is at home in these bitter contrasts of life) Gloucester breaks in suddenly, 'Off with his head.' 'He's sudden, if a thing comes in his head,' said King Edward—and Hastings also sees Margaret as he dies. Richard slays them, but Justice holds his sword.

The scenes which follow, where Richard is induced to accept the crown, as it were by force, and where he apparently persuades Elizabeth to give him her daughter, are weakened by their great length, and almost trench on farce. Richard between the two bishops, with the prayer-book in his hand, is ridiculous; and the scene drags on without Shakespeare's crispness, clearness, or concentration of thought. It is a worse blot on the play than the scenes between Richard and Lady Anne, between Richard and Elizabeth. Richard's dissimulation, in spite of the variety of the dramatic talk, seems in these scenes to pass the bounds of nature. Yet it is difficult to find just fault with Shakespeare. It may be that he desired to mark by their strained unnaturalness that

weakness in the intellect of Richard which arises from the absence of love in his character. Intellectual power, without love, grows abnormal, unbalanced, and weak through pride of itself. Nay more, Shakespeare felt that it would not only lose its power, but finally itself. It would be sure to make mistakes in dealing with mankind and with the movements of the world; to overdo its cunning; to end like the plotting of Mephistopheles, in folly and failure. The common-sense of mankind has decided that long ago. In all folklore stories the Devil—intellect without love—is invariably made a hare of in the end.

In the fourth act the coronation of Richard brings about the first movement towards his overthrow. Elizabeth sends Dorset to Richmond, and we scent from afar the ruin of Richard; and, like the rest, she, when anticipating doom, remembers the curse of Margaret.

As the speakers of this scene depart, they are standing in front of the Tower. Shakespeare, who always prepares his audience, does not let these sorrowful women leave the stage without hinting at the murder of the princes, and with an exquisite tenderness speaks—

Stay yet, look back, with me unto the Tower.  
 Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes  
 Whom envy hath immur'd within your walls,  
 Rough cradle for such little pretty ones!  
 Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow  
 For tender princes, use my babies well.  
 So foolish sorrow bids your stones farewell.

Imagine that! What a playwright was Shakespeare! how effective for the stage is that farewell!

And now, in the next scene (Act iv. Sc. ii.), the disintegration of Richard's intellectual power continues. Anne has already told how in sleep he is not able to beat back superstitious fear. Even his physical courage is then, as we see afterwards, in abeyance.



For never yet one hour in his bed  
 Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep,  
 But with his timorous dreams was still awak'd.

Richard is represented by Shakespeare as without a soul, being without love. But this is when he is awake, and his will at the helm of his life. When he is asleep, Shakespeare, with his belief that in the far background of an evil nature the soul lives, but unknown, unbelieved in, by its possessor, shows how it awakens at night when the will sleeps, and does its work on the unconscious man. Then, and only then, conscience stirs in Richard. Then, and only then, fear besets him. The day-result of this work of the soul at night in Richard is plainly suggested in the dialogue. He is represented at all points as in a state of nervous strain of which he does not know the cause; and this ignorance, irritating the intensity of his wrath with any obstacle, throws not only his intellect, as I have said above, but his management of men and events out of gear. His intellect is no longer clear, for his body is no longer sane. All his powers, even his hypocrisy, are decaying. His doom has begun.

Moreover, he now begins to feel the steady pull of the universe against immoderate crime. To escape this hitherto unknown terror he is driven, as it were by necessity, to add crime to crime. He proposes the death of the princes to Buckingham—'I wish the bastards dead.' Buckingham retreats from this, with a courtier's words—

BUCK. Your grace may do your pleasure.  
 K. RICH. Tut, tut! thou art all ice, thy kindness freezes.

And this hesitation dooms him—

CATES. The King is angry : see, he gnaws his lip.  
 K. RICH. I will converse with iron-witted fools  
 And unrespective boys : none are for me  
 That look into me with considerate eyes.  
 High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect.

And when the princes are dead, Anne his wife shall die,

and he will marry Elizabeth. 'Murder her brothers, and then marry her—uncertain way of gain.'

This is the wild hurry of crime—Justice driving its victim—

But I am in  
So far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin :  
Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.

To double this guilty speed, the news comes of Richmond preparing a power, and the news abides, stings and irritates within him. Its inward insistence breaks out in short soliloquies, even when alone with Buckingham. The accomplished mask-wearer drops his mask; betrays himself. His self-control is giving way; and with that, his intellect fails still more; fails so much that he is touched with superstition. He talks of prophecies—of warnings given by a bard of Ireland. All through this little scene with Buckingham (Act iv. Sc. ii.) he has lost his coolness of temper and his hypocrisy in irritability. His nerve is gone, like Macbeth's, but, also like Macbeth, his courage lives on. The affection is of the mind, not of the body.

And now, just at the turn of things, when Richmond begins to increase and Richard to decrease, Margaret fitly appears for the last time, and at first alone, to concentrate their curse, and hers. Two splendid lines introduce the vengeful Queen.

So, now prosperity begins to mellow  
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.

To her enter the Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York; and they join in the doom Margaret pronounces on Richard. Had Shakespeare written this scene with his matured power and concentration, it would have been a matchless scene. As it is, it is of an extraordinary force—mightily conceived and shaped. One after another, these three, whose darlings Richard has slain, sit down,

ravished with sorrow, like three Fates, on the earth of England 'unlawfully made drunk with innocent blood.' Hooded, old, grey with grief, are Margaret and the Duchess; Elizabeth, though not yet old, is one with them in sorrow, a prey of time. Under the palace walls, all three, royal yet huddled in the dust, prophesy the wrath and the decrees of justice. They concentrate, not only the misery of their own grief, but all the woe of the Civil Wars, into their speech; and bring the whole weight of their sorrow and sin to a point in Richard, on whom falls their accumulated curse. Margaret rises above the others in the joy of revenge, and leaves them to their session on the earth. 'Forbear,' she cries to Elizabeth, who asks for help in cursing—

Forbear to sleep the night, and fast the day ;  
 Compare dead happiness with living woe ;  
 Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,  
 And he that slew them fouler than he is :  
 Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse :  
 Revolving this will teach thee how to curse.

Their curse is deep, but it is deepened when Nature herself retreats before it, when it is stronger than motherhood. The scene closes when on Richard's head—who now, in fine dramatic contrast to this almost solitary scene, comes marching by with warlike sound and pomp on his way to overthrow Buckingham—falls his mother's curse. And the curse is a prophecy, as it were, of all his victims will say to him the night before Bosworth field. It is often Shakespeare's habit to anticipate in a short passage a scene which he means to give in full, a sketch of the picture to be completed ;

Therefore, take with thee my most grievous curse,  
 Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more  
 Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st !  
 My prayers on the adverse party fight ;

And there the little souls of Edward's children  
 Whisper the spirits of thine enemies  
 And promise them success and victory.  
 Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end ;  
 Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.

The scene with Elizabeth which follows is of that cunning which overreaches its aim. Richard thinks he has persuaded Elizabeth to give him her daughter—

Relenting fool, and shallow changing woman !

But it is he who has been deceived, he whom the woman has played with. She pretends to consent, but is already in communication with Richmond, to whom she does give her daughter. From this point of view, which I think Shakespeare meant,<sup>1</sup> the unnaturalness of the scene (the far too great length of which is only excused by the impossible effort Richard makes) is modified; and the weakness which has come on Richard's intellect is more than suggested. All is breaking down in him; his self-control, his temper, intelligence, his clear sight of things, his foresight, his power to keep men and subdue them to his will.

The art is excellent with which this is shown in Richard's talk with Catesby, Ratcliff, Stanley, and the messengers. He is no longer the calm, smooth, cautious, deliberate, unimpassioned politician, all his powers held in hand. He gives half-orders, and stops short, yet thinks he has fully given them, as with Catesby. He gives orders and withdraws them, suspicion darting into his mind, as with Ratcliff—

K. RICH. Catesby, fly to the duke.  
 CATES. I will, my lord, with all convenient haste.

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<sup>1</sup> See Act IV. So. v., where Stanley says to Sir Christopher Urswick Richmond's emissary—

So, get thee gone, commend me to thy lord.  
 Withal, say that the Queen hath heartily consented  
 He should espouse Elizabeth her daughter.

- K. RICH. Ratcliff, come hither. Post to Salisbury :  
When thou com'st thither,—[To CATESBY] Dull,  
unmindful villain,  
Why stay'st thou here, and go'st not to the duke ?
- CATES. First, mighty liege, tell me your highness' pleasure,  
What from your Grace I shall deliver to him.
- K. RICH. O ! true, good Catesby : bid him levy straight  
The greatest strength and power he can make,  
And meet me suddenly at Salisbury.
- CATES. I go. [Exit.]
- RAT. What, may it please you, shall I do at Salisbury ?
- K. RICH. Why, what would'st thou do there before I go ?
- RAT. Your highness told me I should post before.

[Enter STANLEY.]

K. RICH. My mind is chang'd.

He flies into a passion with Stanley, but in the end believes in him; yet Stanley is the only one of his followers who is deceiving him. Richmond's name makes him as fierce in words as Macbeth was when his doom had come. The nerve-storm is speaking.

STAN. Richmond is on the seas.

K. RICH. There let him sink and be the seas on him !  
White-liver'd runagate ! What doth he there ?

Speech after speech his fury increases. Messenger after messenger comes in with bad news. The third brings good tidings. Richard anticipates it as misfortune, and strikes him down—

Out on ye, owls ! nothing but songs of death.

The furies are upon him.

The fifth act opens with the death of Buckingham. He also feels that divine justice has descended on him. His false oath has come home; and, like the rest, he sees Margaret as he dies.

‘When he,’ quoth she, ‘shall split thy heart with sorrow,  
Remember Margaret was a prophetess.’

And now all the interest centres around Richard. He has been used by Justice to punish the rest. His

own doom (now that he is with himself in a terrible solitude) is close at hand. Richmond, who is here only a shadow, brings with him the just sentence of God.

God and good angels fight on Richmond's side.

But though justice is to be done, yet Shakespeare will not quite degrade Richard out of the sympathy of the audience. Action and its need have partly healed his fluttering temper. His native courage, his pride of birth, his natural joy in battle, have dispersed his dreams for a time. His orders are sharply, clearly given. He speaks again like a great commander, and he dies a soldier and a king.

Shakespeare knew the relief which the crisis, having come, gives to a courageous man. He knew also that no amount of crime could do away with physical courage, or make a man forget that he was of high lineage, if that had ever been a power in his life. And it was deep in Richard:

Our aëry buildeth in the cedar's top,  
And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun.

Yet, neither courage nor pride are what they were.

So, I am satisfied. Give me a bowl of wine :  
I have not that alacrity of spirit,  
Nor cheer of mind, that I was wont to have.

The phrase prepares us for the well-known scene in which the courage of Richard when he is asleep trembles before the ghosts of all whom he has slain. It is equally prepared for by the prayer of Richmond for the help of God whose captain he accounts himself, the minister of whose chastisement he is. Night falls, and each ghost, rising one after another—Prince Edward, Henry VI., Clarence, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, the young Princes, Lady Anne, Buckingham—speaks to Richmond

of victory, lays a curse on Richard. Each bids him 'Despair and die.'

In this, the predominant idea of the drama—the working out into catastrophe of all the evil of the Civil Wars—is brought into full prominence, since Richard is the incarnation of that evil. The connected idea of the supremacy of justice in the course of the world is also brought out so forcibly that Richard, for one brief hour, recognises the lordship of conscience, though he argues that it ought to have none over him. The supernatural world can alone convince him of his guilt, and he fights against the conviction. It is only in the half-conscious state, between sleep and waking when one is scarcely one's self, that Richard gives way to conscience and to fear, and in that state speaks that wonderful soliloquy, which—if we take it as the confused utterances of a man who is half asleep and half awake, half in the supernatural terror of his dreams and half in his reaction from them, half himself, half not himself—is an amazing piece of subtle analysis, only not succeeding altogether because it was more difficult to shape in words than mortal man could manage. None but Shakespeare would even have tried to put it into form.

K. RICH. Give me another horse ! bind up my wounds !  
 Have mercy, Jesu ! Soft ! I did but dream.  
 O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me.  
 The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.  
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.  
 What ! do I fear myself ? there's none else by :  
 Richard loves Richard ; that is, I am I.  
 Is there a murderer here ? No. Yes ; I am :  
 Then fly : what ! from myself ? Great reason why :  
 Lest I revenge. What ! myself upon myself ?  
 Alack ! I love myself. Wherefore ? for any good  
 That I myself have done unto myself ?  
 O ! no : alas ! I rather hate myself  
 For hateful deeds committed by myself.  
 I am a villain : Yet I lie ; I am not.  
 Fool, of thyself speak well : fool, do not flatter.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues  
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
 And every tale condemns me for a villain.  
 Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree :  
 Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree ;  
 All several sins, all us'd in each degree  
 Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty ! guilty !'  
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me ;  
 And if I die, no soul will pity me :  
 Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself  
 Find in myself no pity to myself ?  
 Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd  
 Came to my tent : and every one did threat  
 To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.

On this Ratcliff breaks in and, for a minute or two, the dream, lingering as dreams linger, still holds Richard in its grip. Then, fully awake, he shakes it off—

By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night  
 Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard  
 Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers,  
 Armed in proof, and led by shallow Richmond.

The momentary weakness of fear, the momentary belief in conscience, which, with all that guilt behind, might make him die ignobly, pass away. He scorns his dreams, he mocks at conscience.

Go, gentlemen ; every man unto his charge :  
 Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls ;  
 Conscience is but a word that cowards use,  
 Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe :  
 Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.  
 March on, join bravely, let us to't pell mell ;  
 If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell.

And his speech to his army is a masterpiece of bold mockery of the foe, and of appeal to the pride of England ; the words of a fighting partisan, of a king at bay. As we read it, we should sit in his soul, below the words. I wonder if Shakespeare meant the overstrain I seem to detect in it to express the hungry despair which so lately had clutched his heart, and which he strove by passionate



words to beat under. He bluffs himself. It is impossible not to sympathise with his self-conquest and courage; and Shakespeare meant us to do so. Since justice is done, pity may steal in; and circumstance has made Richard its victim, as well as his own will. He goes to battle with a joyful courage, as to a banquet. Macbeth's courage was intermingled with the despondencies of crime and of loss of honour, for he had loved and sorrowed, and of old had resisted evil. Richard's courage has no tenderness, no sense of violated honour to trouble it, for he has never loved. It has no despondency, no philosophising on life and death, when the crisis comes. There is a physical rapture in it.

A thousand hearts are great within my bosom :  
 Advance our standards ! set upon our foes !  
 Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George,  
 Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons !  
 Upon them ! Victory sits on our helms.

But there is no victory for him—

The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead.

Yet, he perishes like a king, slaying five Richmonds in the throat of death. His death would be the death of despair, were he not greater than despair itself. The drama closes with that speech of Richmond's, in which the wrong, the fraternal slaughter, the misery of the Civil Wars are dwelt on, resumed, and absolved in the reconciliation of the white rose and the red, in the union of Richmond and Elizabeth—

Smile, heaven, upon this fair conjunction,  
 That long hath frown'd upon their enmity !

Justice has done her work ; and she retires, well pleased.

In this play there is the same conception of an over-<sup>7</sup>ruled Justice as we have found in *Romeo and Juliet*. Punishment, not arbitrary, but the direct consequence

of crime against humanity, falls on all those who have caused the Civil Wars. This is clearly an artistic conception, and has its parallels in the Greek drama, as for example in the *Seven against Thebes*.

As a dramatic subject, *Richard III.* did not afford sufficient opportunity for the representation of the manifold varieties of human life which now began to allure Shakespeare. It was confined within a limited set of people—kings, queens, the noblesse and their dependants—within their selfish quarrels and ambitions. And what a set they are! And the women, if we exclude the Duchess of York, are nearly as bad as the men. Nor, with the exception of Richard and Margaret, is any one of them seriously intelligent or interesting. Shakespeare must have been tired of the odiousness of it all, tired even of his conception of Justice working out her law on states; anxious to live among a brighter and more varied class of characters, and freely to develop them.

Moreover he was, I think, weary of the limitations laid upon him by the close following of history. Of this last weariness he got rid, as I have said, in *Henry IV.* by entering into the life of the people.<sup>1</sup> I am not sure that he did not begin to break loose from both these limits by the writing of *Richard II.*, where, while following the main lines of history, he develops out of his own imagination, and apart from history, the character of Richard after his return from Ireland. The Richard of the castle scenes and of the rest of the drama is not the Richard of history. He is Shakespeare's own, as complex in character as Richard III. is simple. It is this out-

<sup>1</sup> We may trace this desire to represent the people even in *Richard III.* The little sketch of the Scrivener, Act III. So. vi., is done by a master-hand. We see and feel the man. The three citizens who meet and discuss the political situation in the second act belong to the honest, god-fearing, steadfast, commonplace burghers of London. Their talk is representative, yet each of them is quite distinct in character.

break of Shakespeare's into pure invention which seems to suggest that *Richard II.* was written after *Richard III.* Richard II. has no ambition to be greater than he is. He desires to be let alone to enjoy himself. Richard III. is ambition incarnate. The one has only one desire, the other has a hundred; and the hundred desires make his character as complex as the other is simple. The one is devoid of love, and therefore devoid of imagination. The other has tenderness, pity, sweetness, and thoughtfulness, when he has gone through sorrow; and because he loves and desires to love, he is capable of imagination. Shakespeare makes him more than capable of it. He gives it to him after his fall, and in his hands he becomes the shaper of poetry.

Then, again, the character of Richard II. grows into nobility; at every change he gains; he is noblest before death; but the character of Richard III. loses power day by day, loses even intellectual power, and he ends as only a royal bravo. There is also far more characterisation and invention in *Richard II.* than in *Richard III.*, and I think this suggests at least that the former was written after the latter. Moreover, the characters who are of vital interest are much more numerous in *Richard II.*, more vivid, more distinct, more complex. The Queen in *Richard II.* is only touched, yet she is alive and distinct, and so is the Duchess of Gloucester. Anne and the Duchess of York in *Richard III.* are not clearly, though they are elaborately, drawn. In *Richard II.* Gaunt is extremely interesting; Old York and Bolingbroke, even Mowbray, are all clearly individualised; but Buckingham, Rivers, Hastings, and Grey in *Richard III.* are not. The only creature, save Margaret and Richard, who is specialised into a greater vitality than the others in *Richard III.* is Clarence in the Tower before his death.

The play itself is unequal, strangely unequal. Its con-

duct wavers from excellence to mediocrity. The over-length of such scenes as that before the coronation, and that between Richard and Elizabeth, wearies an audience, and the first of these is not redeemed by brilliancy of thought or dramatic play. Shakespeare had not yet learned concentration or moderation. There is none of his plays in which one more regrets the Greek measure, and the Greek power to say enough and no more.

Its finer poetry is of less impressiveness because it is the poetry of cursing—a matter somewhat naturally apart from beauty. And the cursing is too long to be intense, to have that closely knitted passion which lifts the curse into the world of art. Margaret rarely reaches that: Lear reaches it in a few sentences. Only one passage in the whole play rises into a splendour of poetry, so piteous and so beautiful that it will live for ever. It is the dream of Clarence.

## V

### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

THIS play is made up of two separate stories woven together by the dramatist, and with his finest stage-skill, intelligence, and passion. Both of them came down from ancient times. These are the story of the cruel Jew and his debtor, and the story of the heiress, her suitors, and the caskets. They seem to have had a kind of chemical affinity for one another, for it is said that they were combined in a lost play called *The Jew*, acted before 1579. The story of Antonio, Bassanio, the Jew, and the Lady of Belmont who rescues the debtor, Shakespeare found fully developed in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's collection of Italian tales (*Il Pecorone*), and followed its plot closely; adding to it the casket tale, which, in the midst of serious elements bordering on the tragic, introduces others of lightness, grace, charm, and love. Yet, in the lightness is a weighty strain of thought, made partly by the deep and steadfast qualities of Portia's womanhood, and partly by the greatness of the love between her and Bassanio.

To enliven the drama with gaiety, three additions are made—first, the elopement and the characters of Lorenzo and Jessica; secondly, the story of the rings which winds up the play; and, thirdly, the humour of Launcelot Gobbo. These are so skilfully intertwined with the two main stories that they enhance their interest, seem to have been always part of them, and play in and out of them like gay and happy children among grown-up folk.

What with these two stories combined, with two episodes added, and with a humorous element, one might expect some failure in their amalgamation by the dramatist; but it is not so. The plotting of the play is admirable; its stage-management a triumph; and the characters so relieve, excite, develop, act and react on each other, that there is not one hitch, one jar, in the play from end to end. It is a masterpiece in its own difficult kind of drama, and it has always kept the stage.

The *Merchant of Venice* is an early play, probably written in 1596, before the tragedy of life had laid its heavy hand on the mind and heart of Shakespeare. Yet, early as it is, it is as mature in form, stage-craft, and execution as it is in thought. The art-development of Shakespeare's imagination was as quick in its movement as his intellect, and that seems about as quick a thing as this world has ever known. In a great artistic genius all the capacities have equal power and penetration; and the formative power, as here, does not fall below the conceiving power. And both are as various and distinctive in the making of the lesser, as they are in the making of the greater, characters in the play. Lorenzo, Nerissa, Bassanio, Jessica are as clearly presented as Shylock and Portia and Antonio, and as self-harmonised.

In its combination of the serious and the gay the drama is fully romantic. It is also romantic in its mingling of the two stories, in its being a delightful piece of story-telling, and in the freshness and frankness of its two love-stories of Portia and Bassanio, of Lorenzo and Jessica. But it is not romantic in its conciseness, nor is the story of the heiress, the suitors, and the caskets in itself romantic. It is rather an old folk-tale which has been variously wrought in various nations. But it is made romantic by the passionate love between Portia and Bassanio, and by the bold adventure Bassanio, when he is so

poor, makes, for love's sake, to win his wife. Men may accuse him, he feels, of desiring the money of the heiress, but he does not care; he knows he desires her, and her alone. Moreover, Antonio's lavish friendship, willing to sacrifice not only wealth but life for Bassanio's love, is another motive common in the great stories of romance. And whenever, in modern fiction or drama, such a friendship lives between a grave man, bordering on old age, and a young, gay, affectionate, wild fellow, capable of better things, and nice in honour, it is as instinct with the spirit of romance as the *Merchant of Venice* is.

Shakespeare has not yet passed out of his romantic, though he has begun his patriotic and historical, period. The romantic still overlaps the patriotic. The time came when he left it behind him, and entered the tragic darkness of mankind. Something of that tragedy is already here. The romance of the play is less prominent than the tragedy of life. The tragedy passes into happiness for all but Shylock, but the tragic also moves through our horror at the hatred and vengeance of Shylock; through our pity for his nation's fate, and for his own overwhelming ruin; as well as through our pity for Antonio's loss and pain. - But the element of romance steals into the tragic matter when a woman is made the dissolver of all the trouble, when Portia cuts the knot of Shylock's cruelty; and in still lighter fashion, when, in order to prove that she was the lawyer, she invents the episode of the rings, the gaiety of which relieves the seriousness of the judgment scene.

Along with the romantic elements in the play, there are, as in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, elements which belong to the Renaissance, now fully afloat in England. The drama is laid in Italy, whence the New Learning came, to which all the cultivated class of young men who could afford it went to be

filled with the spirit of the classic life; where they found education in art and scholarship, in law, in literary form, in stories and story-telling, in the finest poetry and in the knowledge of life. There too they drank deep of the spirit which filled them with an unappeasable desire to attempt every kind of art, of knowledge, of adventure; to realise every kind of life—a spirit which ran through the whole of the Renaissance of that time, like blood through the veins of a man.

Those who were by nature good brought back good from Italy; those who were weak or wicked came back either exhausted or five times as wicked as before. This play is full of Renaissance characters. Salanio, Salarino, Gratiano are the full-blooded young men of the time. They feast and drink and sing, invent pageants, and fill the streets with jovial riot. They are pleasant attendants of Antonio, the rich merchant; of Bassanio, the fine gentleman of the period. Lorenzo is the gentler type, the half-scholar, the half-poet, who loves the classic tales and philosophy, and who lives on a higher level of character than the rest of the young men. Also, Jessica has heard the Greek and Latin stories; and her charming talk with Lorenzo about the night and stars and music reveals the widespread culture of the time. Even Launcelot talks of 'the Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three, and such branches of learning.'

Moreover, that Shakespeare shared in the trend of the Renaissance to philosophic disquisition, thickly sown with classical allusions, such as formed the amusement of the Academies in Florence and elsewhere, is proved by this play. The Prince of Morocco, and he of Aragon, indulge in such disquisitions over the caskets. Bassanio does the same, though his philosophising is saturated with his eager love. The whole scene might be a pleasant exercise of the wits in the Rucellai Gardens in Florence playing with



different views of life. Portia is always a piece of a philosopher, full of gracious moralities, of wise thoughts of life and love and service; and her speech to Nerissa, or that to herself while Bassanio is choosing the casket, with its classic imagery and its passionate wisdom, is instinct with the finest elements of the Renaissance. Of the same kind is the talk of Lorenzo about music, in which all the stars are quiring to the young-eyed cherubim, in harmonies that our muddy vesture of decay prevents our spirit hearing; where love of music is the test of goodness in men, of gentleness in beasts. Pure Renaissance that! pure Florentine!

And now we may think of the *mise-en-scène*, and of the clearness with which Shakespeare has realised the life of Venice and of the mainland. We see nothing of the beauty of the sea-city. Shakespeare had never seen it. But we get the atmosphere of its world-wide trade, of Venice as the Lady of the seas. Antonio is the merchant prince, loved of all who knew him, save of those whose usury he hinders. He neither lends nor borrows for advantage, but lives on the level of the ancient Roman honour. Such were the great lords of Venetian commerce in the noble days. All his ventures are at sea and all are large: 'his argosies, with portly sails; do overpeer the petty traffickers.' North, south, east, and west the Venice merchants drove their barks. Antonio has ships which do business with Mexico, England, the West Indies, India, Barbary, Tripolis, and Lisbon. So wide, Shakespeare felt, was the outgoing trade of Venice; and no less wide did he make the inflowing of nations into her port. The suitors of Portia arrive from all parts of the world—from France, England, Saxony, Morocco,

From the four corners of the world they come.

This overshadowing commerce is then the point on which

Shakespeare seizes, in an England now bidding for the commerce of the seas; that is, he seeks, in order to give weight to his imaginative work, for historical reality. Then, he pictures the internal life of the city—the merchants congregated in the exchange and mart of Venice on the island of Rialto. We see the crowds, we hear the chaffer, and among the rest watch Shylock and Tubal creeping by; the usurers, the hated Jews of the time. Then, too, in the talk of Salanio, Salarino, and Gratiano, the gossip of the exchange is brought to our ears.

Another piece of historical reality is the way in which the unswerving constancy of Venetian law is dwelt on. The royal merchant must bend to the law, even when his adversary is a cruel Jew, whom every Christian abhors. The Duke himself cannot wrest the law to do a great right. Shylock rests on the law, on the sanctity in the law's eyes of his bond. The court is strict;

There is no power in Venice  
Can alter a decree established:  
'Twill be recorded for a precedent,  
And many an error by the same example  
Will rush into the state. It cannot be.

Moreover, it is by process of rigid law that Shylock is disappointed of his revenge, and punished. All this is fully characteristic of Venice when she was great. Shakespeare knew it from the many English who in times past had done business with the merchants and state of Venice; he grasped it and used it to give vitality to his play.

One other piece of reality remains. At that time and afterwards, and even now in sad decay, there were on the mainland stately country-houses where the rich Venetians lived. They had noble gardens, and were adorned with art. Music, dancing, the joy of life, went to and fro among their rooms, and a crowd of followers filled them. Belmont is a good picture of one of them

We see the large reception-rooms, the host of retainers; we hear the trumpets that herald the Princes; we are told of the great park and the gates. And the only description of natural beauty which we find in this play is of the night-scene in the gardens, when the moonlight sleeps on the bank, and in the soft stillness the musicians wake Diana with a hymn. This too is strict reality, yet it is romance—romance, instinct with love, and set over in the drama against the rigid law and eager commerce of the city of Venice.

I have said that it was difficult to bring together two stories of so different a spirit as those of the Jew and Antonio on one side, of the caskets and Portia on the other. But once it was done, and with such superb skill, their interlocking adds a great charm of change and variety to the play. We are transferred, but not too often, from the heated atmosphere of a great town to the quiet of the country; from trade, usury, and speculation to the affairs of love; from the sadness of Antonio and the hatred of Shylock to the gaiety of Portia, to the mingled mercy and justice of her noble nature; from the solemnity of the judgment-hall, where life and death are at strife, to the stillness of the starry night, and lovers in the garden for whom life is opening all its brightness. To and fro, in this fashion, like the earth's sphere, like life itself, we pass from sunshine to shadow, and from shade to sun. Love and hatred, cruelty and mercy, sorrow and joy, worth and villainy, age and youth, stern justice and soul-subduing pity, meanness and magnanimity, interchange their action and their passion in this play. Every character is alive from head to heel with intellect, emotion, and imagination. The ideal voice of poetry speaks always, but at the base of the idealising lies fact. Truth to the realities of life is the foundation on which Shakespeare builds the palace of the ideal.

The play opens with the sadness of Antonio, striking the keynote of the tragic in the tale. It is perhaps the sadness of presentiment; presentiment of which Shakespeare was so fond; which he so often, with his tendency to mysticism, introduced into his plays. Antonio does not know why he is so sad. He is yet to learn the reason. It is the shadow of the future moving towards him; and Shakespeare wakens thus the curiosity and interest of his audience. It is not anxiety for his merchandise that makes Antonio sad. He denies that imputation. It is not the sadness of love. 'Fie, fie,' the dignified gentleman answers to that accusation. The sorrows and joys of love are both behind him.

The causeless sadness wearies him, Antonio says. And it may be that Shakespeare wished to sketch in him the merchant, who, engaged for many years in large affairs of trade, feels weariness of this life steal upon him. It is not, then, the sadness which is the cause of his weariness; it is the weariness which makes the sadness. Antonio is tired of the world, and these words are full of that obscure disease—

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano ;  
A stage where every man must play a part,  
And mine a sad one.

His cry is still stronger in the judgment-hall, but with more reason. The very pleadings of the court for mercy to him weary his impatience with life. Let me have done with living;

Most heartily I do beseech the court  
To give the judgment.

I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
Meetest for death : the weakest kind of fruit  
Drops earliest to the ground ; and so let me :  
You cannot better be employ'd, Bassanio,  
Than to live still, and write mine epitaph.

Nor is his farewell to Bassanio less charged with the

apathy of life. With this grey, melancholy middle-age is contrasted Gratiano, his dependant, but his friend; the embodiment of riotous youth, overflowing with life like a sapling in spring. He is too wild even for Bassanio, who begs him to tame his spirits before he goes to Belmont. Nay, answers Gratiano, 'but I bar to-night: you shall not gauge me by what we do to-night.' He cannot hold his tongue in the judgment-hall, and his outbreaks are in detestable taste. He speaks 'an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in Venice.' Nerissa will tone him down a little, when he marries her. They are well matched. She also has a tongue of her own. But in spite of this gallop of speech over infinite nothings, Gratiano, in defence of himself, has plenty of good sense. Not one of the folk in this play is without the active intelligence of the New Learning. His view of the transiency of love is set forth admirably and in good poetry (Act II. Sc. vi.). His answer to Antonio's cry that his part on the world's stage is a sad one is full of that wisdom of youth which is so much wiser than the wisdom of a wearied age—

Let me play the fool :

With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,  
And let my liver rather heat with wine  
Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.  
Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,  
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?  
Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice  
By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio—  
I love thee, and it is my love that speaks—  
There are a sort of men whose visages  
Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,  
And do a wilful stillness entertain,  
With purpose to be dress'd in an opinion  
Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit.

But fish not, with this melancholy bait,  
For this fool-gudgeon, this opinion.

This is the brimming note of idle youth. It jars the

graver man, but men have no right to become as weary as Antonio. He owed this good manners to the world, to meet his troubles brightly. Yet he was a lover of men and was loved by them. Therefore, he had great consolation, and should have made more of it. He had magnanimity, that rare possession. With it went a splendid generosity. He gave, even to the danger of his life. Wealth had not degraded his character. He lent his money without interest, and when he borrowed, 'twas 'not for his own advantage.' He kept his state, was lavish in it, yet without ostent. His flatterers and dependants speak freely to him. Neither Salanio nor Salarino can be called his parasites. He enjoys the enjoyment of others, though he is sad; and his love for Bassanio passes the love of woman. He is almost pleased to die for him—

Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death;  
 And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge  
 Whether Bassanio had not once a love.  
 Repent not you that you shall lose your friend,  
 And he repents not that he pays your debt;  
 For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,  
 I'll pay it presently with all my heart.

The friendship of such a man lifts Bassanio to a higher level in our eyes. Only at one point does Antonio jar upon us—in his intolerance of Shylock, which is carried beyond our sense of decency. He spits on him and spurns him, calls him dog, misbeliever, cut-throat, cur. But this is of the time at which he lived. It was the common usage; and Antonio was not beyond his age. Moreover, a great part of it Shylock deserved.

Opposite Antonio, at all points contrasted with him, Shylock is set. Mean, mercenary, ungenerous, ignoble in thought and deed, consumed with evil passions—he is the darkness to Antonio's light. They clash: in the struggle Antonio is, day by day, pressed down into misery; but when Shylock's evil is at the point of triumph, it is utterly overthrown. And there is the

centre of the play. There the ancient contention of darkness and light, of summer and winter, of good and evil, the root of a million million shapes of art, is presented in another shape before us.

Shylock is not only Shylock : he is the personification, in Shakespeare's intention, of the evil side of the Jewish nation. And, in Shakespeare's mind, the evil side was rooted in love of money. It was in the carelessness and contempt of gain for gain's sake that Antonio found the greatness of his character. It was in the sordid care for money that Shylock lost his soul. Out of this filthy desire were born hatred, malice, cruelty, revenge, and envy—envy of Antonio's greatness of mind, hatred of his generosity, revenge on him for his scorn of usury. At last, as greater serpents devour the less, these dreadful passions in him devour even the love of money. The offer of thrice his money does not tempt Shylock away from his revenge. The baser passion is despised in the kingdom of evil by the aristocrats of that kingdom, hatred and vengeance. It is only when Shylock knows that he cannot gratify them, that his love of money returns, and he leaves the court more ignoble than he was when he was feeding fat his grudge against Antonio.

Shakespeare goes to the heart of Shylock in his first meeting with Antonio.

SHY.           What news on the Rialto? who is he comes here?  
 BASS.           This is Signior Antonio.  
 SHY. [*aside*]. How like a fawning publican he looks!  
                   I hate him for he is a Christian;  
                   But more for that in low simplicity  
                   He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
                   The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
                   If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
                   I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
                   He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
                   Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
                   On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
                   Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe,  
                   If I forgive him!

This hate and malice double and treble: these passions are always their own fuel. Moreover, they gather fuel from every circumstance, as love gathers love. The great passions scoop all the world into themselves.

As on the Rialto, so in his home his soul is in his moneybags. His daughter cannot bear living with him. His servant thinks himself famished and runs away, like his daughter. He hates the feast he is bid to, but goes to feed on the prodigal Christian. He detests masques, pageants, music, and joy. Yet, he is sensitive enough to have presentiments, like Antonio. The spirit in a man is deeper than his character, and feels, in another dimension, by a consciousness beyond our tabernacle, what is coming. Such a spirit, thought Shakespeare, is even in the evil man. 'There is some ill,' cries Shylock, 'a-brewing towards my rest.'

By Jacob's staff I swear  
I have no mind of feasting forth to-night ;

Then fresh circumstance—Jessica's flight with Lorenzo—doubles his rage. It is increased by her becoming a Christian, and still more by the loss of his money and jewels. This maddens his evil passions into fury. When serpents are hatching, the sand grows hot around them, hurries their growth, sharpens their poison.

SAL. *I* never heard a passion so confus'd,  
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,  
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets :  
'My daughter ! O my ducats ! O my daughter !  
Fled with a Christian ! O my ducats !  
Justice ! the law ! my ducats, and my daughter !  
  
And jewels ! two stones, two rich and precious stones,  
Sto'p'n by my daughter ! Justice ! find the girl !  
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats.'

But Shakespeare is not content to picture his rage by another man's mouth. He brings it, with Shylock himself, upon the scene ; and few things more wonderful have



ever been briefly written of many broken, varied passions, confused by their own fury, and storming through a man's soul, than the interview of Tubal and Shylock.

All this infernal fire seethes in him, till at last Antonio is in his hands; and it motives, sufficiently to satisfy what is just in art, the inexorable thirst of his revenge in the scene in the court. Without this preparation, his height of malice and fury would seem immoderate—

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing  
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
A losing suit against him. Are you answered?

BASS. Do all men kill the things they do not love?

SHY. Hates any man the thing he would not kill?

BASS. Every offence is not a hate at first.

SHY. What! wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?

These are terrible sentences, and they are matched by those that follow, till he leaps forward with the knife to the breast of Antonio: 'Most learned judge! A sentence! come, prepare!' Then, at the very height of his passion, on the very finest edge of his revenge, he is defrauded of his desire. Baffled by his own passions, hurled from his dark heaven to his deepest hell, he passes from the court in a dreadful loneliness; so baited by his foes that we feel half inclined to take his part. To take his goods was just, and half of them goes to his daughter. To make him a Christian on pain of death was unjust, and unfair to Christianity.

It is like Shakespeare to gather some vague pity round him at the last. Moreover, we are prepared beforehand even for that. Shylock is made bad by the degradation of the world, the love of money. But he is made more than bad by untoward circumstance. One man, who has no care for money but flings it away, stands in his path and loathes him as a Jew. His daughter robs

him, flies from him with a spendthrift Christian, and becomes a Christian. There is some excuse for his overtopping hatred. In an odd recess of our nature, it is possible to give it a faint sympathy. Then, he is once, at least, not thinking of himself, but of his nation and his religion. He is not only Shylock, he is a Jew. He hates Antonio, for he is a Christian. The sorrows of his race, the injustice done his people for ages are in his heart, and he adds them to his personal hatred. Moreover, even in his rage, he has his tender memories of the past. Perhaps only Shakespeare would then, midst of Shylock's sordid soul, bid arise the vision of Leah, the sweetheart of his youth: 'Thou torturest me, Tubal; it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.'

We pity him then in his torment, but Shakespeare makes a bolder claim on our pity. Shylock appeals to humanity itself against the vast injustice meted out to his race. We are Jews, but we are men. I will avenge my nation and myself.

SALAR. Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that good for?

SHY. To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and, if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

This is his challenge to humanity, and fierce as it is, it stirs our pity and our sense of justice.

In the midst of this whirlpool of rage and sorrow, Shakespeare, with his dramatic habit of relieving and enlivening his audience, introduces Launcelot Gobbo, the peasant-servant, the humourist of the piece. His father, a poor peasant of the mainland, brings a basket of doves as a suitable present to Shylock. Launcelot, now of the town, is far beyond that naïveté. The city has given him wit and individuality. He is able to imagine two persons in himself, the fiend and his conscience, and to conceive of himself as a third who judges between the other two. Jessica finds him a merry devil, and he is as self-contented as Autolycus, but no rogue. The humorous strife he pictures in himself between his conscience and the fiend, his jaunty play with his sand-blind father, are a happy change, for the moment, from the furious hatred of Shylock and the heavy fates hanging over Antonio. Yet Shakespeare, always careful for the knitting of his play into unity, links Launcelot to the Jew, to Lorenzo and to Jessica; and then, having bound him up with the Jew story, now binds him up with the casket story. He sends him to Belmont as one of Bassanio's servants.

At Belmont we meet Portia, the queen of the play, the Muse of Wisdom and of Love. Her wisdom, we understand, is partly hereditary: it is the wisdom of her father's goodness. The fantastic lottery he devised, in the Three Caskets, for his daughter's marriage, is felt, even by Nerissa, to be wise. The right casket, she thinks, will never be chosen rightly, but by one who shall rightly love, who 'shall give, and hazard, all he hath'—a keen definition of the true lover; and Bassanio, the true lover, understands it. But Portia's wisdom is, above all, the wisdom of fine womanhood. Underneath her distinct

type, and unaffected by her wealth and rank, the instincts natural to pure womanhood direct her speech and action. She is as natural as Eve in Paradise. And it is by these instincts, that, in moments of crisis, she acts with a noble promptitude. When she hears Antonio's letter telling of his cruel fate, touched with sorrow, she breaks out with her native impulsiveness ;

O love, despatch all business, and be gone.

Her passionate pity forgets her marriage.

When Bassanio is gone, when all the rest are confused, she sees in a moment the right thing to do, and does it instantly. She carries out her plan with a gracious audacity, and is so gay in her travesty of herself as a man—as Rosalind was—that she makes fun of herself with Nerissa. Yet, the steadfast weight of her character always tells on her company. Respect and honour follow her. The princes bow to her will. The love she so frankly confesses to Bassanio does not lessen, but increases, his reverence for her. That light girl, Jessica, loves her and thinks that 'the poor, rude world hath not her fellow.' Her servants worship her ; and Nerissa, in her close confidence, at home with all her thoughts, never varies in respect for her. Lorenzo, full of reverence, is struck by her intelligent judgment of affairs, by the nobility of her quick unselfish action in all that concerns Antonio and her husband. She knows, as few women do, what a friendship between one man and another is, and acts for it, even though it separates her from Bassanio on her wedding day ;

Madam, although I speak it in your presence,  
 You have a noble and a true conceit  
 Of god-like amity ; which appears most strongly  
 In bearing thus the absence of your lord.

A great lady, of a great house, her manners are those of well-bred society. It is a gross mistake when the actress

who represents her forgets this, and, when Portia is gay, makes her skip about the stage as if she were Nerissa. Because she is merry, it does not follow that she is skittish. She ought always to keep her dignity on the stage, and the stately manners of her rank. With what graceful courtesy she receives the princes of Morocco and of Aragon; how full of respect they are, even when they are disappointed! Yet, she is as natural as the day, as unconventional as Rosalind, though she is so much older; and as free of her tongue as that delightful girl. Her intellect is not as keen and swift as Rosalind's; it is more the intellect of a highly educated person who has great practical ability, than a naturally fine intellect like Rosalind's. She has the training of the New Learning; is not without its knowledge of the classics, nor without its philosophic moralities, nor without its love of music. This play is full of the loveliness and charm of sweet music, and Portia is its lover. So is Lorenzo, so is Jessica. The gardens of Belmont are alive with music. And here Bassanio is to choose the casket to the sound of music. If he fail, he makes then a swanlike end, fading in music; if he win, the music is the flourish with which a king is welcomed, or a bridegroom hears on his marriage day. When Bassanio goes to the caskets, she is quite at home in her classical illustration—

Now he goes,  
With no less presence, but with much more love,  
Than young Alcides, when he did redeem  
The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy  
To the sea-monster: I stand for sacrifice;  
The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,  
With bleared visages, come forth to view  
The issue of the exploit. Go, Hercules!  
Live thou, I live: with much, much more dismay  
I view the fight than thou that mak'st the fray.

Her philosophic turn is always womanly. It does not argue, but speaks on the impulse of the hour, touched

into sudden thought by some impression from nature or human life. Quick on the touch her natural wisdom begins to flow. A happy goodness then inspires her soul into speech, as when her unpremeditated appeal for mercy enchants the court of law. Or, we hear some note of the universal reason, some pregnant saying to explain life; I quote her talk with Nerissa when she comes home. It touches with delicate grace one side of Portia's character, the meditative, pensive side—

- POR. That light we see is burning in my hall-  
How far that little candle throws his beams!  
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.
- NER. When the moon shone, we did not see the candle.
- POR. So doth the greater glory dim the less:  
A substitute shines brightly as a king  
Until a king be by, and then his state  
Empties itself, as doth an inland brook  
Into the main of waters. Music! hark!
- NER. It is your music, madam, of the house.
- POR. Nothing is good, I see, without respect:  
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.
- NER. Silence bestows that virtue on it, madam.
- POR. The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark  
When neither is attended, and I think  
The nightingale, if she should sing by day,  
When every goose is cackling, would be thought  
No better a musician than the wren.  
How many things by season season'd are  
To their right praise and true perfection!  
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion,  
And would not be awak'd.

Again, like many other women of the time, she knows some law; and has probably studied at Padua. When she adopts the lawyer's robe at the trial, she is quite at home in it. The phrases of the profession are at the fringe of her lips. Never was a more charming lawyer; she is easily counsel, jury, and judge; and all the men show dull before her mastery. She alone is the overthrower of Shylock, the saviour of Antonio. She knits together in this judgment scene the two parts of the play. The

woman of the caskets solves the question of the Jew and his victim. Everything in the drama radiates to this scene, and Portia is the centre of the radiation.

What I have said of her belongs chiefly to her womanhood as it appears openly to the world. But she is far more than these externals, though they are part of her womanhood. They suit her like well-fitting garments, but they scarcely reveal her inmost self. When, however, we first meet her, she is alone with her maid Nerissa, and we are nearer to her secret. Her first sentence, and perhaps Shakespeare meant this, matches her temper with the first sentence of Antonio. He is weary in his age. She, in her youth, is momentarily tired: 'By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world.' Nerissa smiles, and answers to her mood, playing, like her mistress afterwards, with philosophy. Even the servants are touched with the New Learning—

You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are: and yet, for aught I see, they are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing. It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean: superfluity comes sooner by white hairs, but competency lives longer.

At this sententious mirth Portia is weary no longer. When her intellect is stirred, her sadness vanishes into gaiety. 'Good sentences,' she cries, 'and well pronounced.' 'They would be better,' answers Nerissa, 'if well followed.' Then Portia lets her wise wit fly—

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions: I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree: such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple.

And now, being turned to wit, she sketches, with a gay

sarcastic grace, all her suitors. The passages are worth a little study, for they probably express Shakespeare's opinion of the uneducated upper classes in society; in Naples, France, England, Scotland, Germany. 'God defend me from them,' says Portia. 'God made him,' she says of the Frenchman, 'therefore let him pass for a man.' 'I like the German very vilely in the morning, when he is sober, and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk. I will do anything, Nerissa, ere I'll be married to a sponge.' As to the English baron, Shakespeare himself speaks by Portia's mouth. 'How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.'

This is the gay, unmalicious satire of a girl amusing herself at home; and we think, with no ungracious envy, how entertaining Bassanio will find her in the morning garden after breakfast. She will be different when evening falls, and the sentiment of night is born. Then she will speak as she does to Nerissa in the scene that I have quoted. For her moods change with change of circumstance. But we have not pierced as yet to the inmost shrine of her nature, where Love sits and commands her. She would not be true Italian, not a woman of her time, nor the complete woman she is, had she not felt through all her nature the lifting wave of passion. Her confession of love to Bassanio, before he chooses from the casket, might seem too frank were it not that they had often met before, as Shakespeare is at pains to tell us, and interchanged 'speechless glances'; were it not that Bassanio has declared his love again and again before he runs his risk of failure. Her speech to him is an answer, not a proposal. Yet, though warm with love, it is full of a noble restraint. She says enough to let Bassanio be sure she loves him, but she keeps back much, for, if he were to choose wrongly, she must say farewell



to him for ever. Yet we feel, while she speaks, that she has faith true love will solve the riddle rightly. This little speech is a masterpiece.

Afterwards, when her lover has chosen and he is hers, the humility of love enters into her soul and makes it the home of grace, dignity, and happiness. She lays herself, her heart, her spirit, her home at his command. It might seem as if she had lost her individuality too much, were it not that Bassanio's reverence for her is deepened by the yielding of her love. It is the giving of love, not the giving up of personality. She claims, not long after, full equality with him in affairs, and she is more than his equal. Only love makes Portia yield herself, and in the yielding she retains her dignity and her distinctiveness. But the cry, where we reach to her very centre, is that she utters to herself alone when she sees Bassanio choose the right casket, and knows that she will have her life in having her love. No one hears it; it is the voice of lonely passion, and no words of love are more intense in Shakespeare—all the more intense for her call for temperance in that she feels. This cry comes out of the white fire in the innermost chamber of Portia's soul. She sees him touch the leaden casket where her portrait is, and to herself she speaks—

How all the other passions fleet to air,  
As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embac'd despair,  
And shuddering fear, and green-ey'd jealousy.  
O love! be moderate; allay thy ecstasy;  
In measure rain thy joy; scant this excess;  
I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,  
For fear I surfeit.

There is the essence of the woman.

In the trial scene she is the mouthpiece of Bellario, but her speech on the excellence of mercy is her own. It is excellent, but it owes its astonishing vogue more to the religious form it takes than to any unequalled

supremacy in its poetry. There are many passages in Shakespeare far beyond it in high imagination. We are glad when the judgment scene is over, and she becomes the Portia whose quiet wisdom says to Nerissa, as she comes into her park beneath the moon—

How many things by season season'd are  
To their right praise and true perfection !

Farewell, then, to Portia. She will live as long as the stage lives, and, after that, in the hearts of men who like a woman to be better than themselves.

Lastly, there is the little pretty idyll at the end, a pleasant relief from the heated airs of the judgment-hall. We slip from Venice and the crowd, from trade and its angers, from the tragic fates of men, into the moonlit gardens of Belmont, into the laughing, loving company of Jessica and Lorenzo. Shakespeare was still, in this early play, the dramatist of love—of love with a hundred facets, like a diamond. It was not now so much the passion itself that he described as the various forms the passion took. Here, having represented in Portia and Bassanio love in its stateliness of manners and of thought, in its recognition of duty and great affairs as moderating its intensity, he represents a lighter phase of love—not stately and without any relation to duty or society, not immoderate because so light, having the passionateness of youthful life but no more than that—in Jessica and Lorenzo. These gay and airy creatures, the butterflies of the play, dart in and out of the scenes, flitting, with a touch of pleasure, from character to character; quite irresponsible, not conscious of a conscience as yet, all for love and joy and for both without a thought of the past or the future; not knowing where they are going, drifting by chance to Belmont; but so charming, so honest in their lightheartedness and loving that Portia hands over to them the care of her

household, that every one is fond of them. They deserve, though they have done nothing to deserve it, the fortune of the Jew. It will not make them more happy or less happy than they are. They will spend or give it all away.

Here, in this final act, these butterflies are at last at rest at night under the stars; and though their love is gay and aerial, it is, at this learned and cultured time, decked out with imagination and with thought. Their imagination is poetic and their thought not remote from the philosophy and the classic spirit of the New Learning. Few passages in Shakespeare have more of the far-off magic of poetry than this converse between Lorenzo and Jessica.

*Belmont. Avenue to Portia's house.*

*Enter LORENZO and JESSICA.*

LOR. The moon shines bright : in such a night as this,  
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees  
And they did make no noise, in such a night  
Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,  
And sigh'd his soul towards the Grecian tents,  
Where Cressid lay that night.

JESS. In such a night  
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew,  
And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,  
And ran dismay'd away.

LOR. In such a night  
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand  
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love  
To come again to Carthage.

JESS. In such a night  
Medea gather'd the enchanted herbs  
That did renew old Æson.

LOR. In such a night  
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,  
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice,  
As far as Belmont.

JESS. In such a night  
Did young Lorenzo swear he lov'd her well,

Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,  
And ne'er a true one.

LOR.

In such a night

Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,  
Slander her love, and he forgave it her.

JESS.

I would out-night you, did no body come ;  
But, hark ! I hear the footing of a man.

Then, after an interruption—

LOR.

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank !  
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears : soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
Sit, Jessica : look, how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold :  
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.  
Such harmony is in immortal souls ;  
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

*Enter Musicians.*

Come, ho ! and wake Diana with a hymn :  
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,  
And draw her home with music.

JESS.

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

LOR.

The reason is, your spirits are attentive.

Such was, in Shakespeare's imagination, the pleasant talk of lovers in that cultured time, lovers worthy of that exquisite song Bassanio hears when his love leads him to choose rightly.

Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head ?  
How begot, how nourished ?

Reply, reply.

It is engender'd in the eyes,  
With gazing fed ; and fancy dies  
In the cradle where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell ;  
I'll begin it,—Ding, dong, bell.

ALL.

Ding, dong, bell.

And so, with that sweet sound, farewell to the *Merchant of Venice*.

The conventional poetic note which we have observed here and there in *Romeo and Juliet*, and which tragedy may excuse, may be said to have wholly disappeared in this play. Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and the rest speak among themselves the language of men of the world, engaged in great or small affairs. Antonio's high-moving phrases, when they occur, are natural enough to his sentimental character. When Bassanio and Lorenzo talk to their sweethearts, their speech, of course, lifts itself into poetic forms; and it is the same with Portia, who speaks in gay prose when she is not deeply moved. Salarino's description of the possible loss of Antonio's ships is heightened by his imaginative turn; but otherwise we may say that in this play, and for the first time, the conversation is entirely natural and easy, in harmony with the character of the speakers and with the various situations. Shakespeare has simplified his methods.

~~The characters, not only of the chief but of the lesser personages, are clearly divided from one another. No one could confuse Gratiano with Salarino whose half-poetic fancy divides him from his companions; or Salanio, who is of a less intelligent type, with Salarino. Each stands separate.~~ *Bassanio too is a complicated individuality*

As to Bassanio, much more might be made of him on the stage than is usual among actors. To conceive him rightly one ought to know something of the social life of Venice when the city was not only great but magnificent. Bassanio is not only young, handsome, with love-inspiring eyes, and impetuous (he will not wait a moment, even at Portia's request, to make his choice of the caskets); he is also a splendid noble, whose train and liveries are gorgeous, who comes to woo Portia in all the glory of

young Venice. A fine splendour ought to belong to his representation. Along with that, the actor ought to conceive his soul. He is essentially loveable. Men like Antonio love him; Portia loves him, Nerissa thinks no one so worthy of Portia. He is himself capable of true and passionate love; yet, to rescue his friend, he leaves Portia upon his wedding day. Moreover, he is not the splendid lover only; he is also one who has considered the world in quiet thought. His speech over the caskets is that of a man who has seen and brooded over many characters, and the two illustrations he uses in talking to Portia are both drawn from public affairs, as if he were at home in them. They lower, it is true, the note of passion which ought then to prevail, but they also slide into the scene the image of the Venetian state which is deliberately impressed upon the play. There is a certain conventionalism in his speech when he unveils 'fair Portia's counterfeit,' but he makes up for that afterwards when his modesty is made certain of her love for him. He is worth an actor's study.

A word may be said concerning the representation of Shylock. I suppose it is the tradition to represent him as a decrepit, old, and dirty Jew, in worn and almost ragged clothes, with a senile stoop and manner—I have seen him look like Fagin on the stage. The Duke calls him 'old Shylock,' but to be old is not to be decrepit. He is in full possession of his faculties; he can dine out; he is active on the Rialto; his stormy passion of wrath and revenge is not that of a feeble old man, but of a man of sixty or so who may be called old, but whose blood is hot and his will resolute.

He is a miser, or rather a gold-breeder, but he is not a ragged miser, nor a dirty one. I am sure Shakespeare meant him to be clean and decently dressed, and respected by his countrymen on the Rialto. The Christians

might call him dog, but Tubal and the rest knew better. Though he keeps Lancelot's extravagant temper in order, he does not really stint his food. Loss of jewels and money maddens him, but other folk than misers are affected in the same way. His miserliness has been exaggerated into an extreme, and it is plain that his love of money is absorbed by his hatred and his love of vengeance.

At first he is only the business man who makes money breed as Jacob made his ewes. Then suddenly it occurs to him that he will take the chance of entrapping Antonio; and then hate conquers money-getting. Moreover, the Jew in him arises, and money-getting is also lost in the desire to avenge the cause of Israel against the Christian. Both of those passions mingle in him, one personal, one national, and strengthen one another. Then, he is uplifted, far above the usurer and the vulgar Jew, on to the tragic plane. The servility of the Jew is killed. His speech gains nobility; it is resolute and strong. Only to Tubal, his countryman, does he reveal any weakness after his first outburst of rage in the streets. He claims the law; he appeals to the Duke, he puts the whole of Venice into action and disturbance. He attacks the jailer in the streets for permitting Antonio to take the air. The fury of his passion has made him for the moment another man. He ought to tower in the court. Bated breath and whispering humbleness or mean cunning have nothing to do with his appearance. His revenge should straighten his back, and flame in his eyes, and dignify his port. The more he towers above the rest, the more dramatic his sudden fall may be made; the fiercer, the more absorbing is his passion, the more it forgets everything but itself, the more the actor has to do when his revenge is cut away from under his feet. When the actor makes him an object of pity during the judgment

scene, he misses Shakespeare's aim. When the judgment is given, and not till then, pity may be claimed; but it is pity greatly modified by horror at the image he has presented of unrelenting and furious revenge. I do not believe that Shakespeare meant us to have more pity for Shylock than may be felt for him after his speech in which the Jew appeals to the Christian as man to man: 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' Nor do I think that his last speech is the speech of a broken man. Even after his terrible overthrow, enough of the swell of his rage and hatred lasts to take him with some tragic dignity out of the court. He accepts his fate, but it is with flashing eyes, and his 'I am not well' need not contradict this. He flings it to them as an excuse for departure.

I pray you give me leave to go from hence ;  
I am not well. Send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it.

When Shylock breaks down, it is when he is alone in his empty house. And Shakespeare leaves that to our imagination.



## VI

### AS YOU LIKE IT

THE title strikes the chord of this beautiful, gay, and graceful play. Shakespeare laughed out the title one day after reading what he had written. 'Take it as you like it, in whatever way it pleases you. Take its mirth or seriousness, its matter of thought or fancy, its grave or lively characters, its youthful love and self-conscious melancholy—take anything you like out of it. There is plenty to please all kinds of men. It is written for your pleasure. Take it for your pleasure.'

The solemn professor, the most solid moralist, will not be able to assert that Shakespeare wrote this play with a moral purpose, or from a special desire to teach mankind. He wrote it as he liked it, for his own delight. He hoped men would listen to it for their pleasure, and take it just as they liked best to take it. It is true there is much matter in it, as there is in human life, which the prophets and moralists may use for their own purposes, but Shakespeare did not write these things for their ethical ends. He wrote them because they were the right things in their places; and he smiled, as he wrote them, with pleasure in them. 'I do not mind,' he would have said, 'how you use my play, if only you let the lover and his maiden, the Duke and his hunters, the fool and the shepherd, Jaques and Silvius and Phœbe, aye and the forest and the deer, do with it also what they like, and as they like it. I have made a new Thing; let every one enjoy it.'

We have therefore got back, out of the tragic and semi-tragic world in which we have been, to Shakespeare's full and delightful gaiety, to the very root of his nature, to that which made his tragedy so intense—paradox as that saying may seem to be. In *As You Like It* we touch Shakespeare as Nature freshly made him, the wise, delightful, sunny Creature, whom Nature in her happiest hour gave to us for our eternal pleasure. And, indeed, Milton seems to have felt that this grace, wildness, gaiety, sweetness and joy, were the primal things in Shakespeare. When he writes of him, he does not think of the great tragedies, but of the times when

Sweetest Shakespeare, Nature's child,  
Warbles his native wood-notes wild.

And 'wood-notes,' that selected word, may have been used as Milton thought of the wood near Athens and of the forest of Arden.

It was after the misery and slaughter of the Civil Wars, after *Richard II.* and *III.*, after *Henry IV.* and *V.*, that Shakespeare returned to his sunny happiness in three delightful comedies—*Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *As You Like It*. With this return he resumes his constant subject, in its joy or its sorrow, the subject of love. And in these comedies he is at play with love. They are ruled by the god of love at his choicest pranks, in Protean shapes, and varied through a multitude of moods. Most men at Shakespeare's age (he was now about thirty-seven or thirty-eight) would have lost their youthful brightness, gamesomeness, and delight in life. Love would have ceased to be radiant, jewelled with joy, and full of sport. But Shakespeare has lost nothing. He is Orlando; he is Rosalind. 'Age cannot wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety.'

In this play love lives in many forms: in Orlando and

Rosalind, Celia and Oliver, Silvius and Phœbe, Touchstone and Audrey. We see also other forms of love: the love of two girls for one another, of Adam for his master and his master for him, of Touchstone for Celia and Rosalind. Even a few touches are given to us of a daughter's affection for her father. But these kinds of love, outside the passion of youthful love, are but side-issues, due to the love of Shakespeare for lovingness. Of them all, in comparison with the enchanted drawing of love between man and woman, Rosalind's phrase may be said, 'But what talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando?'

In this play also the lovers love one another at first sight.

Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might :  
Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight ?

is the cry of Phœbe when she sees Rosalind, and thinks she is a man. Rosalind is smitten the moment she sees Orlando, Orlando when he sees Rosalind. When Oliver and Celia meet, they 'no sooner saw one another but they loved.' We know from *The Tempest* that Shakespeare kept this belief of his early life to his later days. It was like his naturalness to believe in love at first sight, like a man who lived in that swift and undelaying time, like the southern warmth of his temperament, like his reverence for passion as a native goodness in human nature. And love, in his work, even when it breaks at once into the full-blown rose, is always modest, chaste, true, faithful, and full of fire and joy. Moreover, when circumstance is not dark, it is not isolating, selfish, foolish, or sentimental. It thinks of others; it sees things clearly, and is quick to meet them. It has fine intellect at hand to use, and uses it. And it is full of common-sense.

There is not a word of this which might not be proved from the love-play of Orlando and Rosalind. That is one

of the gayest things in Shakespeare. The wit which flashes through their conversation does not lessen its clean brightness from the beginning to the end, neither does the pleasant humour which plays innocuous over every circumstance, over every character, and over the natural world. Nor is the humour forced or conventional or derived from others. It is the natural bubbling up of the fountain of happy youth into gracious gaiety of temper, into self-delighting joy. We, who listen, cannot enjoy the humour of the situation when, dressed as a gallant hunter Rosalind meets Orlando, half as much as she enjoys it herself. She plays with it as a kitten with a ball. Her love develops, does not check or dim, her humour. As to her natural intellect, it is the same with that. Love has not impaired it. It is as swift and various as summer lightning; and though it flashes here and there and everywhere, it always strikes the point at issue. It sees into the centre of all masked conventions. It understands Jaques in a moment, though he is a man of the world and she a girl; and lays him bare to himself. Yet all the time this clear-eyed intellect is working on life, she is so deep in love that it cannot be sounded. In her, emotion and intellect are equal powers.

O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded: my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the bay of Portugal.

Orlando's love is of the same quality, full of gaiety, even though—for he cannot find Rosalind—it be dashed with a shade of natural melancholy: amusing itself with delightful verses hung on happy trees, ready to play with the pretty youth he is pleased to call his Rosalind; witty enough to make the talk lively, not witty enough to displease the girl who would not wish him to be brilliant when he thought he was away from her; of a grave intel-

ligence also when he chooses; able, like Rosalind, to overcome Jaques with his own weapons.

Love, with him, is no mournful, depressing companion. It kindles into brightness all his powers, as it does with Rosalind. There is no fading in its rose, no false sentiment, none of the marks of a dying lover. Rosalind sees this, and would be inwardly pleased with it—

A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not; but I pardon you for that, for, simply, your having in beard is a younger brother's revenue. Then, your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. But you are no such man: you are rather point-device in your accoutrements; as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other.

In both, their love enkindles, not only itself to finer loving, but all their natural qualities. To read of it is pleasure. It gives almost as much pleasure as it has.

The love of Celia and Oliver is of a different kind, a swift, mutual passion, more of the senses than the soul. Rosalind does not like it, as we hear from her account of it. She is more scornful than pleased. It jars on her dignity, on her humorous nature. There is no play in it, such as she has had with Orlando, to keep it healthy. And we do not expect it of Celia; this kind of passion does not lie in her character as we have seen it; and I think Shakespeare has been betrayed into inventing something which is not quite in nature by his desire to wind up his play by such a reconciliation of Oliver and Orlando as will make everything comfortable for Rosalind and Orlando in the future. It is against probability that Oliver should change in a moment from the scoundrel he is in the first act to a high-bred gentleman, only because his brother did not allow him to be killed by a serpent and a lioness. The invention of the lioness and the fight

becomes improbable because of the main improbability. And, moreover, I cannot get over the matching of Celia to a man whose nature has been for many years that of a ruffian, a murderer, and a greedy dog. It stains her pleasant image. Oliver has repented, but we are sorry for Celia. Shakespeare ought not to have made him so very bad in the beginning, if he was to be so good in the end. It is out of tune.

In the original story the improbability is not so great. Oliver, after his banishment, meets Celia as she is being carried away by robbers, and rescues her. Had Shakespeare alluded to this event, as he might easily have done, he would have 'motived' that strangeness in Celia's conduct which even love does not fully excuse. It would make her conduct possible, but not beautiful. The event may have been in his mind, and its insertion neglected, but the text does not support that suggestion. This thing is a blot on the play.

The love of Silvius and Phœbe is the conventional love of the Elizabethan Pastoral; and it may be, in this love-drama, a satire on that academic, literary love. He who conceived the natural love of Orlando and Rosalind would see no reality in the artificial love of Corydon and Phyllis; and it would be quite like Shakespeare to make a picture of it, partly for the sake of pleasant mockery of it, and partly in order to contrast it with natural love in Rosalind and Orlando. But, as he is in earnest all through this play, and as love of whatever kind is at root serious as well as gay to him, he touches the love of Silvius with reality. Its expression goes far beyond the conventional phrasing of the Pastoral. It seems a pity that Silvius is almost too great a fool for any woman to care for. But he is in earnest, and Rosalind sees that he is; and while she strives to lash him into rebellion against Phœbe, she also takes some pains to get

his sweetheart for him in the end. She does not pity him, for his want of manliness deserves no pity; but she uses Phœbe's love for her (as a man) to soften her heart, to make her understand what Silvius has suffered; and, in that new temper, Phœbe takes Silvius because he has been faithful. The conventional love is led into the natural; and the way it is managed is as pretty a piece of work as is to be found in Shakespeare.

The best characteristic of the play is beauty. I am not sure that it is not the most beautiful of all the comedies, because the beautiful in it is so joyous, and distributed with so equal a hand over the whole. It is pervasive, like a sweet air in which all things are seen delicately. There may be lovelier or grander passages of poetry in other comedies than any we find here, but no other comedy has the same equality of poetry, the same continuity of lovely emotion, of delightful charm, and of finished execution. And though the poetry in the tragic plays may have more of fire and sensuousness, of emotion breaking into ideal form, of thought on the verge of the eternal intelligence, yet here, where the gentle note of gaiety naturally eludes these supreme qualities, there is abundance of good matter, of the stuff of thought, of what Arnold would call the criticism of life. Few plays are wiser, more full of affectionate experience of human nature. And without that element of human wisdom and affection there is no great poetry.

A greater beauty even than this is the beauty of character. Rosalind and Orlando! could any one desire to have more charming, more ennobling companions than these two enchanting persons? To live with them is to live with moral beauty, but it is not a beauty which the pharisaic moralist will like at all. Their life will do good to every one they meet. Rosalind even lifts her thought, at times, into a spiritual beauty, and then

returns to the natural, like the lark who soars in song and then drops downward to her nest. The characters of Celia, and of almost all the rest, are lower than Rosalind's, but they have a steady sweetness of nature. Of course, Jaques is set over against them, but even he is better than the cynic. There is a sadness in him which is real; he is not so bad a man as he has been; he is meditative, and has at times the gentleness of pensiveness. Then the banished Duke is a noble gentleman; worldly-wise but enjoying the woods, pleased even with Jaques when in his sullen fits he is full of matter; taking all his misfortunes with a gallant air, and turning them into good fortune; translating the stubbornness of ill-luck into so 'quiet and so sweet a style' that all the banished lords are happy with him; finding good in everything, and as kind in his thoughts of animals as of men. Amiens, the other lords, even the pages, are courteous, good-humoured, musical, and ready to help. Silvius is not intelligent, but he is good; Phœbe turns out very graciously; Audrey is an honest creature; Touchstone loves his mistresses with fidelity, though he is naughty enough; Corin is not only an honest labourer, he has also loved and can feel with those in love. As to Orlando, he is as good as gold. The mantle of Rosalind's sweetness and goodness is over them all. We dwell in a world of moral beauty. Its characters soothe and heal the trouble of the world.

/ Lastly, on this matter of beauty, how fair is the scenery, when we have left the Court! Shakespeare builds it up by suggestions on the lips of the actors into lovely landscape. The forest of Arden, by a lucky coincidence of name, puts us in mind of an English forest; and seems to transfer the action to our own land. And Shakespeare, no doubt, with his patriotic passion, would have desired this. Whether he desired it or no, he played into this



idea. He used, as material, his youthful wanderings in the glades and by the streams of Warwickshire.

I was staying at a little village some years ago, and went to walk in Leigh Park. So vivid was the resemblance of the scenery to that of *As You Like It*, that I looked to come across the Duke and his lords dining in a glade, to find a copy of verses on a tree, to meet Rosalind, more than common tall, glancing from grove to grove. Great oaks were in the park, secular gentlemen, knotted and gnarled with many sorrows, and some had their 'boughs mossed with age, and high tops bald with dry antiquity.' A quiet-moving stream ran through the opener wood, pleased with its own chatter; with low sandy banks which broke down towards the shallows; and on one of these, under a broad oak, the animals were wont to cross the stream. 'This,' I said, is the very place where Jaques watched the stricken deer weep in the stream, and the careless herd go by.' And while I stood there, hidden by the oak, it was my good fortune to see a stag leave the herd, and come to drink at the water. Such happy moments belong to life, and are beloved for ever.

It is likely enough that Shakespeare had seen this very place. But whether he drew direct from nature or not, his forest is beautiful. We have walked in it a hundred times. We know intimately the oaks whose antique roots peep out, seen through the water, under the brook which brawls along the wood; the shadowy glades where the Duke dined and the dead deer were laid on the grass; the greenwood, where Robin Hood in old days blew his horn, where the merry-throated birds were singing, where the careless herd or deer swept by; and in whose hollows grew thick the brambles, hawthorn, and green holly. We have seen the outskirts of the wood, where it passed into meadows and low hills covered with sheep. And there, near the edge, we met another stream that broke out

from the forest, amid a rank of osiers. And in a neighbour bottom stood the cottage Rosalind rented from the churlish farmer. Outside the forest skirts she dwelt, like fringe upon a petticoat, a pleasant place that listened to the murmuring stream; and near at hand a sheep-cote fenced about, as by a special gift of Providence to her, with olive-trees. She and Celia, even Touchstone, love the forest, and Rosalind loved it more when she heard Orlando had set up his dwelling in one of its caves. And Orlando thought it a pleasant place when he met the girls. But it had also its horror to one who came upon it, exiled, sorrowful, and starving. When Orlando first sees it, it is to him a 'desert inaccessible, shaded by melancholy boughs'; and in winter those who dwelt in it tell of the 'icy fang, and churlish chiding of the wintry wind,' and of the 'foggy south puffing with wind and rain.'

But now it was summer, now when Orlando and Rosalind flash into it, like two swallows; and the wood is altogether fair; a lovely place for beautiful people to dwell in, and 'fleet the time carelessly as in the golden world.' And now and then, Shakespeare, enchanted with his own creation, carries the forest away from this earth where winter breaks up the joyous plenitudes of summer, and places it in the far land of the imagination, where it is always summer, and wonderful things are common. And while he is there, in the dream, olive-trees slip into the northern forest, and palm-trees receive the love-rhymes of Orlando; the green and gilded snakes of the tropics glide from bush to bush, and crouching in the brake a lean and hungry lioness, with udders all drawn dry, watches a sleeping man—such happy games, for its own delight and careless of reality, does imagination play. The forest is real, and yet slides into a dream, the stuff we are made of. But whether it be real or visionary, it is beautiful.

And now we come more directly to the play. It is adapted from, and follows very closely, Lodge's romance, *Rosalynde, Euphuus' Golden Legacie*, a book issued in 1590. The story is there, but the dialogue, the dramatic arrangement, the characters, and the life in the play are altogether Shakespeare's. He has, moreover, added Jaques, Touchstone, and Audrey, three different types of human nature.

The first act makes the framework of the play. It tells of all the tangles which Rosalind un-ties in the end—the quarrel between the two Dukes, the quarrel between Orlando and Oliver, the dull anger of Duke Frederick, the fate of the banished Duke, the flight, with him, of many great lords to the forest. The working of this main quarrel is the cause why Rosalind and Celia take their flight, and Touchstone with them; is the cause also why Orlando is banished and afterwards Oliver. And finally, out of this quarrel emerges Duke Frederick's repentance and the full solution of the drama. This then is the event which binds all the action into unity.

This act moves at a quiet pace. It is varied, but it only awakens a pleasant excitement. Shakespeare neither hurries his beginnings nor wastes the sensations he keeps for their right place. As usual, he is most careful in his preparation. There's not a matter branched out in the following acts which is not rooted in the first act, except the episode of Silvius and Phoebe, and the love-matter between Celia and Oliver, which seem like after-thoughts. In it Rosalind and Celia are longing for freedom; Orlando sees Rosalind in it, and both are shaken into love; in it Celia is so pained by her father's banishment of Rosalind, that she proposes flight. Rosalind is glad, for she may meet Orlando, who has already gone. Touchstone would go to the world's end with Celia. All converges, speech after speech, scene after

scene, to the flight and the forest; and the gentle excitement of one event after another, and of the thoughts the events have made, has lifted us slowly to the central point, the new and crowning theme on which all the rest of the music is to be wrought—the meeting of Rosalind and Orlando at the beginning of the third act in the forest of Arden. Around these two the rest are grouped, all the action plays, and all the characters develop themselves.

Yet Rosalind and Orlando do not overtop or overweight the play. Shakespeare's dramatic genius has now matured. The too great dominance of the leading characters—that common mistake of dramatists into which Shakespeare seems to have fallen in *Richard II.* and *III.*—is now quite absent from his work. Rosalind is chief, and Orlando next to her; but they do not overwhelm the Duke, or Jaques, or Touchstone, or Celia, or even Phœbe, Silvius, and Corin. These all play their parts, and the part each plays is full of life. And yet, Rosalind does not lose her supremacy. She is still first, but first, not because she is isolated from the other characters, but because she adds life to all that is living in them. She does not put out their light, but kindles it into a brighter flame of character. They burn all the brighter for her influence. A touch from her makes them reveal themselves.

In the first act, Rosalind, Celia, and Orlando are not the gay persons they are afterwards; and no wonder, their circumstances are disagreeable. The suppressed spirit of their youth is longing for freedom. Rosalind, having this longing—and her father's exile and her uncle's jealousy of her intensify it—is sad enough. Yet in her light liftings out of sadness we hear the far-off music of what is coming, the prelude to the happiness of her forest love-adventure. In her sadness also, and because of it, a part of her character is developed by Shakespeare

which we might not have divined from the following acts. We see the seriousness, the deep feeling, the solid sense, which lie beneath her youthful brightness. She cannot 'forget her banished father,' cannot take part in any 'extraordinary pleasure.' She has now the reticent courtesy, the grave dignity and courage of a great lady. No actress who makes Rosalind even half a hoyden has the remotest idea of her character. She speaks to her uncle with due reverence for a great kinsman. But when he attacks her father, and her own honour, she answers him with a noble resolution—

Treason is not inherited, my lord ;  
Or if we did derive it from our friends,  
What's that to me ? My father was no traitor !

Thus she speaks out of that 'silence and patience'—strange words, unlike the Rosalind we chiefly know—which have made the people pity her, and which, mistaken for subtlety of treason, urge the Duke to drive her away. This injustice impels her to a deeper melancholy—'be cheerful, cousin,' says Celia ; and Rosalind, in a transient gloom, is placed before us. Yet, in a moment, so strong is youth in her, she flashes into agreement with Celia's proposition to fly to the forest, and will suit her at all points like a man. An actress should take with her through the forest scenes this serious side of Rosalind's character ; the dignity which even in her 'saucy' play ought to appear, her high sense of honour, her steady common-sense, this clearness of vision, this high resolve in sorrow ; else her acting will miss half of Shakespeare's idea of Rosalind.

But she does not allow her common-sense or her sadness in this first act to interfere with the affairs of love. There she lets Nature have her way, and slips into her love with delight ; silent at first, but silent from inward pleasure. The joy of it uplifts her into a new-created world. And

Orlando enters the gates of it along with her. And with the joy comes, of course, the sweet and tender melancholy of love which knows not yet that it is returned, but is all but sure it is; and which in puffs of alternate painful pleasure and pleasurable pain makes its own drama in the heart. A charming little dialogue tells the story—

Ros. O, how full of briars is this working-day world !

CEL. They are but burrs, cousin, thrown on thee in holiday foolery : if we walk not in the trodden paths, our very petticoats will catch them.

Ros. I could shake them off my coat : these burrs are in my heart.

CEL. Hem them away.

Ros. I would try, if I could cry 'hem,' and have him.

CEL. Come, come, wrestle with thy affections.

Ros. O ! they take the part of a better wrestler than myself !

We feel, through the light melancholy, her innate gaiety; and then out of the gaiety arises her serious fidelity to love. 'Yet,' says Celia, 'I hate not Orlando.'

Ros. No, faith, hate him not, for my sake.

CEL. Why should I not? doth he not deserve well?

Ros. Let me love him for that; and do you love him, because I do.

It is a mingled skein—serious mirth, mirthful melancholy. But it is only untoward circumstance that weighs her down. When she is free in the forest where life and summer are wed, sure of Orlando whose verses she has found, in attire in which she can play with his love and go further in speech than a maiden can—her brightness, joyousness, her happy nature, mount and sing like a bird let loose from a cage. She is fresher than the dew in the forest, more glancing than the stream, and as wild in her grace as the wild rose that flings its branches everywhere; yet, in her wildness is no extravagance, no rudeness, no want of harmony.

With this grave, gay girlhood, with this beauty, she has also intellect and its charm. Celia has quite enough, but Rosalind overbrims with it. It is a natural growth in her,

and comes of her own divine vitality. It illuminates her argument with Celia on the gifts of Nature and Fortune, but there Celia is as quick-minded as she. It is only when she gets to the forest, and is warmed by meeting Orlando, that it develops into sparkle of wit, into power, insight, and good sense. And it adds to her grace, beauty and entangling charm a gaiety that never makes mistakes, a clearness of atmosphere in which what is foolish or merely fantastic, and all speech which is not true or is masked to deceive the world, are revealed, shamed, and undone. When Jaques, attracted by her brightness, airs his melancholy before her, she puts him to flight with a luminous good sense—

JAQ. I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee.

ROS. They say you are a melancholy fellow.

JAQ. I am so; I do love it better than laughing.

ROS. Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards.

JAQ. Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

ROS. Why, then, 'tis good to be a post.

JAQ. I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

ROS. A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad. I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's; then, to have seen much and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

JAQ. Yes, I have gained my experience.

ROS. And your experience makes you sad! I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad: and to travel for it too!

*Enter ORLANDO.*

ORL. Good day, and happiness, dear Rosalind!

JAQ. Nay then, God be wi' you, an you talk in blank verse.

And he leaves her in a huff of vanity, while Rosalind cries after him—

Farewell, Monsieur Traveller! Look you lisp, and wear strange

suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.

Thus, her good sense unveils him. Again, when Silvius crouches under Phœbe's treatment of him, Rosalind is ashamed for the man, and she has no sympathy with the woman. She protects Silvius because he is faithful, for she sees good when it is there; but she despises him for his weakness, and strikes hard on the weak spot. Celia pities him, 'Alas! poor shepherd.'

Ros. Do you pity him? no, he deserves no pity. Wilt thou love such a woman? What, to make thee an instrument, and play false strains upon thee! Not to be endured! Well, go your way to her, for I see love hath made thee a tame snake.

These are the kind of things which weight her wit, charm and joyousness, which add respect for her mental power to our pleasure in her naturalness, which make us think, with satisfied faith in its strength, of her womanhood in contest with the future, and in triumph over it. O, fortunate Orlando!

In the third act she meets Orlando, and that is the centre of the play. Meantime in the second act we are inside the forest, and meet its indwellers. Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone have found their way thither and meet Corin and Silvius. Corin is the honest labourer, old, tired, and practical, but who has had his day of love in youth and remembers it. This hallows his age, and makes it sweet with thought, for Shakespeare was too kindly to leave the old unblest. Silvius seeks Corin's sympathy, for he has known the game and tenderness of love. To ask such sympathy from a shepherd, whose greatest pride now is 'to see his ewes graze and his lambs suck,' who is 'a true labourer,' seems strange, but in Shakespeare's affectionate regard, Corin, whenever he remembers that he was young, and that he loved, is



another man in that sweet air. And then both these lives of his, thinking together, make him say—‘that he that had learned no wit by nature nor art may complain of good breeding, or comes of a very dull kindred.’ Such a one is ‘a natural philosopher,’ says Touchstone, who, while he plays his mocking wit on Corin, respects his honesty and sense. And Rosalind likes the old labourer, and he understands Rosalind. When he talks with her, he rises above his natural level of thought, so greatly does her presence heighten and kindle whomsoever she touches. It is the Corin whom love plagued of old, who makes this speech when he calls Rosalind to see Silvius and Phœbe meeting—

If you will see a pageant truly play'd,  
Between the pale complexion of true love  
And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain,  
Go hence a little, and I shall conduct you,  
If you will mark it.

That is the kindling of Rosalind. Corin is breathing the poetic air of his youth. The years of long labour are forgotten in her presence.

The episode of Silvius and Phœbe seems unnecessary. Its excision would leave the play untouched in interest. The only character it adds to is Rosalind's, and what it adds is scarcely worth adding. But it is amusing on the stage, and it enhances the pastoral and woodland element. It also fills up a gap in the action, and plays another tune than that played by Rosalind and Orlando. Shakespeare was now so brimming over with invention and life that I suppose he could not help these additions. There are artists who would become ill if they did not relieve themselves of some of the host of conceptions which beset them and call aloud for form. This episode is fully and carefully worked, but it impresses one as an insertion.

The little tale of Touchstone and Audrey might also have been left out without loss, and in itself it is disagreeable.

Audrey is scarcely worth drawing, nor is her simplicity humorous except in contrast with Touchstone's cynical cleverness. The worst side of Touchstone appears in his relation to her, and it was a pity to lower his character. Perhaps Shakespeare felt that Touchstone—who is quite out of place in the forest—needed some pursuit, some amusement to vary a life which bored him; and supplied him with a rustic maid to seduce, and a rustic lover to outrival. But the story is unnecessary. Touchstone is elsewhere quite sufficiently and agreeably drawn.

Jaques, like Touchstone, is an invention of Shakespeare. He dominates the second act. Too much has been made, I think, of the Duke's account of the past life of Jaques, as if Shakespeare intended him to be, here in the play, as ugly a character as he had been in the past. That is quite out of the question. Jaques has given up that dissolute life, and shows no desire to return to it, even in thought.

Some say that Jaques is the mere cynic, and his melancholy a bitter melancholy. He has the cynicism, they think, of the exhausted debauchee, who sees no good, or if he sees good, claims it as evil. Jaques does not deserve that accusation. If he has ever had cynicism in him he has now put it outside of him; but he keeps it in his pocket, ready to put it on and off like his cap, as circumstance and fancy lead him. Nor is he a bad man now. No evil creature could laugh so heartily at Touchstone, or enjoy him so thoroughly. Touchstone is professionally what Jaques is actually, the tired man of experience who mocks the world but who would like to find freshness of life again.

Men who have lived the life of a libertine, as 'sensual as the brutish sting itself,' who have exhausted in it physical and mental power, who have not given it up of their own will but because they could not go on with it, who

are consumed inwardly with regret of it—these men hate the world which can give them no more pleasure, envy those who enjoy life, and speak their hate with savage bitterness. The poison of asps is under their lips.

Jaques is no such man. He envies no one. He is satirical, but not venomous. He is drawn to Rosalind and Orlando, though they will not have anything to do with his melancholy egotism, which, in their eyes, makes him wearisome. He seeks people who think, which the worn-out sensualist does not; who have what the Duke calls 'matter' in them for which the mere cynic does not care. He is really interested in the fate of the wounded deer, though he makes it a text for his moralising only, and will not stir from his couch of moss to help it. He is vain of his brooding thoughtfulness, and of course he has plenty to think of. His wild life has given him knowledge of the purlieus of human nature, and their many problems. When he remembers all this matter of humanity, he is sullen, but not savage; and then old gentlemen, like the banished Duke, who are void of his storied experience of life, seek him out and taste through his moralising a pleasant savour of far-off naughtiness, of a world fuller and more varied than the forest. This was sure to please an exile from the world like the Duke, who, though he makes the best of the wild wood, will not be sorry to get back to the court. The good stuff of thought in Jaques somewhat excuses his egotism. But he is over-vain of it, and when Rosalind laughs at his apparent wisdom and tells him it is really folly, he is hurt; and the hurt is the deeper, because an inward whisper tells him Rosalind is right.

Jaques, as Shakespeare drew him, has left his sensual life before he was exhausted, while his body was in good trim, and his brain unworn; left it because he was bored by it. The beginnings of satiety disgusted him,

and he fled to the woods to think and moralise. And there, he used his thinking and moralising to exalt himself in his own eyes; and became a ripe medlar of an egotist. And, naturally, the egotist proclaims his superiority to others, and tries to prove it by mocking at men's folly, and by disclosing their evil. In this way he flatters himself that he is the cleanser of the 'foul body of the infected world,' if only they will receive his medicine. Then, that he should be melancholy belongs to the part he plays, because he thinks he sees so clearly how wrong, silly, and dirty is the world.

This is not cynicism, but may become it. It is a self-created melancholy which runs into abuse of others in order to prove its own rightness; and Orlando and Rosalind, with the clear eyes of youth, and unselfish because they love, see straight into Jaques, think him a poor creature, and he himself sometimes knows it. His melancholy is but the mask his egotism wears. But he wears it well, because he has brains, and because his original nature, which was kindly, saves him from complete bitterness. His indignation is never cruel, and his humour takes the venom out of his sarcasm. Nor is he devoid of imagination, that power too noble to lodge with a cynic. He is indeed more imaginative than Orlando, who is only imaginative because he is young and in love. Jaques is an artist in words. His moralising on the stag is done by one who had great experience in putting things well. And as to his celebrated speech of the world as a stage—it is a model of form, splendidly representing an imaginative conception of all mankind. The one thing its imagination wants is passion, nor has it sympathy or the warmth of pity. But it is his cue, as one of the masquerade, as himself wearing a mask of scornful melancholy, to leave that out. Yet, deep-hidden in his soul, there may have been passion enough as

he declaimed with conventional grimness this picture of poor, foolish mankind strutting and fretting its hour away to end in

Second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

This was a thought which often troubled Shakespeare. But he fell back then on the ineradicable brightness and gaiety of his nature, and made Orlando and Rosalind and a thousand other happy creatures—and then he knew. Men have eyes to see in joy; in half-cynic sorrow they are blind. Nor will Jaques ever see the world truly till he looks at it through the eyes of Rosalind.

It seems probable that Shakespeare intended him to be cured, at least partly, before the end of the play. The snubbing, if I may use that word, he gets from Rosalind—and then from Orlando; the opposition of their naturalness to his conventional sadness, of their freshness to his withered leafage, have done him good, lifted him out of his untruth, and made him fling away his mask in the fifth act. In that act there is no trace of cynicism in his talk. His enjoyment of Touchstone's ways is frank. He wishes the Duke to share it. Nor does he now turn the quaint humour of Touchstone, as he does in the previous acts, into food with which to feed his egotism. He will not yet go back to the world, but will seek the usurper who has taken on a religious life; not himself to be a religious, but to suck some fresh experience—

Out of these convertites  
There is much matter to be heard and learn'd.

And there is no cynicism in the desire. I should not be surprised, if, a few years hence, when Rosalind and Orlando are comfortably settled, Jaques were to visit them, in an excellent humour, and laugh away some days in memory of his follies in the forest.

Touchstone is the professional humorist, the court-jester, the Fool of mediæval society, who 'uses his folly as a stalking horse, and under the presentation of that, shoots his wit.' His conventional wit is set over against the natural wit of Rosalind and is conquered by it. In his encounter with her, he is reduced to silence; but he expresses his defeat with charm. 'You have said; but whether wisely or no, let the forest judge.' Outside of his profession, he is a 'human person.' He is gentle with Rosalind. He loves Celia, and would go over the world with her. He is faithful as the day to her and Rosalind. When he is alone, he basks in the sun, and rails at Fortune to amuse himself. Then Jaques comes upon him, and he detects Jaques as quickly as Rosalind, and without saying anything about what he detects, plays on him, parodies his melancholy, and laughs at him. Jaques describes him, and does not understand what he describes—

And then he drew a dial from his poke,  
 And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,  
 Says very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock;  
 Thus may we see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags:  
 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,  
 And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;  
 And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,  
 And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,  
 And thereby hangs a tale.'

And Jaques, in his vanity, does not know that Touchstone has penetrated him, and is mocking him. So much wiser is the fool than the half-embittered sage.

Touchstone has some learning, and uses it to overawe the simple forest-folk. And it gives him pleasure to play with them and puzzle them. His talk with Corin is full of wit which Corin does not understand, but which is a delight to the audience, who see his real wisdom peeping out under the mask of his folly. With Rosalind, he is not foolish, he is gay. The real man is, as usual, drawn

out by her. With Audrey, he lets the worst of him appear, but with all these folk he is not professional; only a simple mocker, not from any real cynicism, but for the pleasure of mocking. It is only, at the end, when he is brought before the Duke and the lords and pages, in the air of a court again, that he becomes, as he was in the first act, the professional fool again; and is swift, sententious, fantastic, inventive of the pleasant statement of the lie seven times removed, and the quarrel on the seventh cause. All he says now is said by the pure jester who lives to make idle society laugh. The forest episode in his life is over, and he is glad of it.

And now, in conclusion, we get back to Rosalind and Orlando, or indeed to Rosalind alone. With her arrival in the forest, her discovery of Orlando's presence, and the freedom to play with him which her man's garb gives her, all her sadness vanishes, all her nature expands. She opens like a rose in the sun. The forest is her fitting home. Its wild-wood freedom is in her heart, its beauty in her eyes, its summer in her temper. Gay delight in life, enraptured girlhood made tender by love, are at their height in her; the bubbling spring is not more happy. In this exalting of her nature, her wit and wisdom are also exalted. Her wit is more brilliant every hour; her wisdom glances more brightly through her wit; and she uses both, in her sportiveness, to heighten the waywardness with which she adorns the passing hour. 'My Rosalind is wise,' says faithful Orlando. 'Or else,' Rosalind answers,

she could not have the wit to do this: the wiser, the waywarder: make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out at the keyhole: stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney.

There's no play so delightful as hers with Orlando through these two acts. It would be folly to describe it or analyse it, for it may be read; and it is as simple as it

is charming. Light as it is, light as the flight of a swallow, it flies above a deep nature. The moment she parts from Orlando, she shows to Celia the depth of her love. 'I tell thee, Aliena, I cannot be out of sight of Orlando; I'll go find a shadow and sigh till he comes.' When she thinks he is wounded, she swoons; and then, having had play enough, she brings her love to full fruition. She knows when to stop—

ROS. Why then, to-morrow I cannot serve your turn for Rosalind.

ORL. I can live no longer by thinking.

ROS. I will weary you then no longer with idle talking.

And she winds up her own love, and all the loves of the play, and dissolves all the quarrel, by disclosing herself to her father and Orlando—

To you I give myself, for I am yours.

Nor can I put in better words her charm, her nature—the resolver of all tangles, the uplifter of all that is best in each character, the queen of wit and love, than in the verse Orlando wrote of her—

Why should this a desert be ?  
 For it is unpeopled ? No ;  
 Tongues I'll hang on every tree,  
 That shall civil sayings show.  
 Some, how brief the life of man  
 Runs his erring pilgrimage,  
 That the stretching of a span  
 Buckles in his sum of age ;  
 Some, of violated vows  
 'Twixt the souls of friend and friend :  
 But upon the fairest boughs,  
 Or at every sentence' end,  
 Will I Rosalinda write ;  
 Teaching all that read to know  
 The quintessence of every sprite  
 Heaven would in little show.  
 Therefore Heaven Nature charg'd  
 That one body should be fill'd  
 With all graces wide enlarg'd :  
 Nature presently distill'd



Helen's cheek, but not her heart,  
Cleopatra's majesty,  
Atalanta's better part,  
Sad Lucretia's modesty.  
Thus Rosalind of many parts  
By heavenly synod was devis'd,  
Of many faces, eyes, and hearts,  
To have the touches dearest priz'd.  
Heaven would that she these gifts should have,  
And I to live and die her slave.

## VII

### MACBETH

THIS play, it is concluded, was begun in 1605 and finished the following year. It existed only in manuscript till 1623, when it was printed, seven years after Shakespeare's death. Owing to this, it had suffered grievously. There is perhaps no text among Shakespeare's plays more corrupt. Moreover, passing in acting copies through so many representations, it may have been abbreviated here or enlarged there, and there seem to be indications of such work in the text that we possess. Shakespeare, however, followed fairly the general lines of the story as he took it from Holinshed's *Chronicle of Scottish History*. The variations and the additional matter he introduced, as for example the character of Banquo, suggest his desire to please James I. The part the witches are made to bear is perhaps an indirect compliment to the king's views on witchcraft. Then Banquo was said to be an ancestor of James, and Banquo is the noblest character in the play. James was quite vain enough to attribute to himself the excellences of Banquo, and the vision of Banquo's descendants carrying twofold balls and treble sceptres, which predicts for James's gratification the union of Scotland with Ireland and England, underlines the symbolic identification of the character of Banquo with that of James. It seems an incredible resemblance, but a poet who, like Shakespeare, was also a practical man of the world, may well be excused for this. He was a manager as well as a dramatist, and it was the habit of the day to flatter kings—so settled a

habit that our only wonder is that it scarcely appears in Shakespeare. There is nothing in his work which resembles the fulsome adoration of kingship which we find in the dramatists who continued to write after his death.

It is said that Act i. Sc. ii. and Sc. iii. up to the arrival of Macbeth and Banquo on the stage are by another hand. In that case the last words of the witches in Act i. Sc. i.

Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

would be immediately followed by Macbeth's first phrase,

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

And the catching repetition of the thought and the adjectives would not be ineffective on the stage, and for the audience. Moreover, if the play were to be swift, as Shakespeare, when it finally left his hands, certainly meant it to be, this arrangement, which omits the scene of the bleeding sergeant and the second appearance of the witches, would create at the very beginning an impression of headlong speed, as if the dramatist were being driven by a 'fine frenzy' to hurry, incapable of delay, to the terrible centre of the main event.

I should not regret the omission of Sc. ii., which is in parts unworthy of Shakespeare, but I should be led with great difficulty to think that he did not write the greater part at least of the rhyming dialogue of the witches at the beginning of Sc. iii. I see no poetical reason for allotting it to another hand. On the contrary, there are phrases in it which belong to his imagination, and cry out to us, 'We are his only.'

However, this Sc. ii. and the witch-part in Act. i. Sc. iii. delay the play, if it was intended to leap swiftly without Shakespeare's usual preparation into the heart of the tragedy. They seem like a remnant of a longer play.

The same may be said of Act iv. Sc. iii., 'before the king's palace in England,' where Malcolm and Macduff converse. Malcolm's trial of Macduff's honesty by representing himself as a lustful, avaricious, virtueless prince, and asking if such a one is fit to govern, is quite unnecessary to the movement of the play, and delays its speed. The episode concerning the king's evil is equally needless and delaying. Both are out of the atmosphere of the rest of the drama; as if they belonged to a play written originally at much greater length. It is not till the arrival of Ross on the scene that we feel ourselves again in the sweeping wind of the action of the tragedy.

These two parts of the play suggest that Shakespeare did originally write *Macbeth* at greater length, and then, taking out all that delayed it, clasped the rest together into the concentrated rush of the drama as we possess it. In that case Sc. ii. would be the amalgamation, perhaps by another hand, of two or three slow-moving scenes in which Shakespeare prepared for the main event. Were this so, it would account for the lines of fine poetry, plainly from Shakespeare's hand, which illuminate this scene. With regard to the English scene, it would, on this theory, be a remnant of the original play, not reduced, not brought closely together, left with all its loitering, and conceived in another and a quieter atmosphere. This theory is only conjecture, but it is perhaps worth a passing thought.

*Macbeth* is now the shortest of the plays. Swiftmess, every one says, is its main characteristic. We seem, especially if we leave out Act i. Sc. ii., to be caught up from the beginning into the skirts of a hurricane, then swept into its centre when Macbeth meets Lady Macbeth, whirled round and round in it, deafened and blinded by it all through the murderous night, kept in its tempestuous blast through the death of Banquo, the rising

of his ghost, the furious visit of Macbeth to the Weird Sisters, the slaughter of Macduff's wife and children—a tempest of guilt and blood. Nor even then, when all the slaughters are done, are we relieved from the oppression of the storm. Its full fury returns, not in outward crime, but in the hearts of the murderers—in the visions of Lady Macbeth, in the raging despair of Macbeth—till at last the whirlwind which has borne us with such terrible speed suddenly ceases with the life of him who has been its spirit. We have had scarcely time to breathe. Yet nine days are represented on the stage, and there have been intervals of many days. The days, however, make no matter. We are not involved in time as we read or listen to the play, but in that imaginative realm in which a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years. It is not so much events which we hear and see as the thoughts and passions of the soul of man, and especially of two souls who are driven headlong by proud ambition into the abyss. In this metaphysical world there is neither time nor place; the outward crimes, sorrows, battles, are but shadows of the inward realities of which they are the dread result.

The Weird Sisters who preside over the play as the ministers of evil are partly 'metaphysical,' as Coleridge, following Lady Macbeth's phrase of 'metaphysical aid,' justly called them. It has been said that Shakespeare meant them to be no more than the witches of his day as they were commonly conceived. This is quite incredible when we think of that high poetic genius in him which could not have left them unspiritualised by imagination, and which must have felt that these personages, if conceived only as the vulgar witches, would be below the dignity of his tragedy. It is also said that all that was not vulgar in them was in the soul of Macbeth, and not in them. That is a credible theory, but it is not

borne out by the text; and it seems to assert that Shakespeare did not believe in, or at least did not as a poet conceive of, spiritual creatures, other than ghosts, who dwelt in a world outside of humanity, and yet could touch it at intervals when certain conditions were fulfilled. These spiritual creatures, as he conceived them, had chiefly to do with nature; were either embodiments of its elemental forces, or their masters. Such were Oberon and Ariel, but they had most to do with the beneficent forces of nature. Here the Weird Sisters command its evil forces. Whether Shakespeare believed in this half-spiritual world of beings, dwelling and acting in a supposed zone between us and the loftier spiritual world, and having powers over the natural world—I cannot tell, but at least he conceived this realm; and if he believed in it, there were hundreds of persons at his time who were with him in that belief, as there are numbers now who share in it, in spite of science. I do not think, then, that the spiritual part of his conception of the witches was intended by him to exist solely in the mind of Macbeth. On the contrary, I hold that it is incredible Shakespeare should have taken up witches into his tragedy and left them as James I. and the rest of the world commonly conceived them. His imagination was far too intense, his representing power much too exacting, to allow him to leave them unidealised. It is true he kept their vulgar elements for the sake of the common folk who did not think; but for those who did, Shakespeare unvulgarised the witches.

They materialise themselves only for their purpose of temptation; their normal existence is impalpable, invisible, unearthly. When they vanish Banquo cries

The earth hath bubbles as the water has,  
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?

MACB. Into the air, and what seem'd corporal melted  
As breath into the wind.

Elemental beings! inhabiting the world of nature beyond our senses, from whose evil will the limits of our perception defend us. Here Shakespeare has made them, on one side of their being, the comrades or impellers of the destroying forces of nature. They meet in thunder, lightning, and in rain. They make storms; they preside over the hurly-burly of the battle. 'I conjure you,' cries Macbeth, giving them, as the Norsemen to their witches, all power over destructive tempest,

I conjure you, by that which you profess,—  
 Howe'er you come to know it,—answer me ;  
 Though you untie the winds and let them fight  
 Against the churches ; though the yesty waves  
 Confound and swallow navigation up ;  
 Though bladed corn be lodg'd and trees blown down ;  
 Though castles topple on their warders' heads ;  
 Though palaces and pyramids do slope  
 Their heads to their foundations ; though the treasure  
 Of Nature's germens tumble all together,  
*Even till destruction sicken* ; answer me  
 To what I ask you.

These are their works and ways in nature, in dreadful gaiety of destruction.

But the witches are much more than creatures who have power over nature. They have influence also on the soul, but only on the soul that has admitted evil to dwell in it. When the soil is tainted their poisonous seeds take root. When a man has already sheltered a temptation they come to him charged with fresh temptation, and hurry the already cherished evil into outward execution of it. They master the thoughts of Macbeth because they are in tune with them.<sup>1</sup> They

<sup>1</sup> They are the servants of a mistress whose business and pleasure is to do evil. Hecate is 'the close contriver of all harms,' who urges by 'the glory of her art' the wicked man to 'confusion,' to a 'dismal and a fatal end.' She, like the Weird Sisters, belongs partly to the vulgar witch-world, but chiefly to the supernatural world of evil powers. She leads Macbeth into his ruin by a 'false security.' She can distil a magic drop from the corner of the moon. And her delight is in the destruction of Macbeth—soul and body.

have no influence on Banquo, who is innocent of wrong. Nowhere in Shakespeare is a more subtle delineation of the effect of suggested evil on two souls, one in sympathy with evil, the other not, than there is in the scene between Macbeth and Banquo after the disappearance of the witches.

Then, again, they hand on their power of doubling evil in the evil soul through Macbeth's letter to Lady Macbeth. The murder they have half-suggested to Macbeth jumps with the murder in her heart. She recalls their prophecy of the crown for Macbeth when she receives his letter, and conceives at once the murderous means to reach the throne. The golden round, she cries, shall be thine

Which fate and *metaphysical aid* doth seem  
To have thee crowned withal.

She feels the wicked influence of the Weird Sisters, though she has never seen them. They seem to her to be the materialised images of those malignant ministers of evil she invokes to help her to her fierce and bloody aim.

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts ! unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top full  
Of direst cruelty ; make thick my blood ;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
*Wherever in your sightless substances*  
*You wait on nature's mischief !*

Evil to evil ! the witch-suggestions come home and press for execution. This, then, is Shakespeare's conception of the Weird Sisters—not only creatures that have power over the natural forces which do harm to men, but also creatures that have a spiritual power over the soul which has cherished guilty thoughts. Then, Shakespeare, from the common notions of witchcraft,



added to this conception, (since he was a playwright,) the cave, the cauldron, the gruesome ingredients in the wicked broth, the wild and withered aspect of the Weird Sisters, the choppy finger and the skinny lip, the grim mirth of these inhuman Things. These additions did not interfere with the spiritual conception. They belonged to the witches only when they materialised themselves for a material purpose. And, as I think, no one despised them more than the witches themselves. Indeed, these material adjuncts were illusions. They vanish with those that formed them into the filthy air from whence they came.

The play begins with their appearance on the dark moorland near Forres which the wild weather and fire have blasted, and over which, as Macbeth and Banquo enter, a storm is passing with thunder, lightning, and rain. The day has been fair before their coming, now it is foul, and in the foul weather are those who have made it to suit their wicked work. Thus we are brought into the dark atmosphere of the play, as dark without, as it is within the souls of the characters. Night and tempest pervade the play. Duncan dies in a storm; Banquo perishes in the night, in the night his ghost rises; Lady Macbeth walks with her conscience by night and dies before the dawn. Macbeth and she slay their guest in the night, and cry to the night, at every dark deed they do, to hide their guilt, and to assist it. Only one other element of imagination is stronger in the play—that which drenches it with blood. Every scene is crimson with it; it is like the garments in Isaiah's battle, rolled in blood. Macbeth's imagination incarnadines with blood the multitudinous seas. No Arabian perfume will sweeten away from Lady Macbeth's hand the smell of Duncan's blood.

Tempest and terror, blasting lightning, and everywhere

the scent and sight of blood, are the outward image of the inward life in the Weird Sisters and the murderers. This dreadful darkness of the play, spiritual and physical, is deepened at the beginning by the supernatural prophecies which contain in them the slaughter of the king. Macbeth's soul is at one with the tempest and the blasted heath, and the supernatural cry. To Banquo the day is the ordinary Highland day, and the witches are not supernatural. He is the same when he leaves the heath as when he entered it. Macbeth is not. There is that now in his soul which drives him as hunger drives a beast of prey. He carries it with him through his interview with the king, where its urging is quickened by the king appointing his son heir to the crown; where its temptation is kindled into action by Duncan's saying that he will stay the night at Inverness. The opportunity has come. He rides in front of the king with murder in his heart.

Stars, hide your fires !

Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The dark castle rises before us, and within it, waiting in the gloom, murder in every vein, the rider's wife, settled into grim resolve to press on him the finish of the thought with which he rides. And behind rides through the soft afternoon, pleasure and trust in his heart, their murdered man. The evening is calm and lovely when he arrives. Duncan and Banquo speak of its beauty and peace. Shakespeare loves these contrasts. Night falls, and with the night a terror-striking tempest invades the sky, maddening both men and beasts. Lamentings are heard in the air, strange screams of death; the obscure bird clamours the live-long night; the earth is feverous and shakes. A falcon, towering in her pride of place, is by a mousing owl hawked at and killed; Duncan's horses devour one another. Shakespeare fearlessly piles terror

on terror; nature herself, as in all his plays, in aristocratic sympathy, celebrates with earthquake and wreck the death of princes. But there is no outward terror so deep as that in the soul of Macbeth in the castle court before he goes to his slaying, and in the soul of his wife as she waits, every sense attent, in the same court for his return. I doubt if in all literature there is any silent and whispering fear to be compared with that which thrills the air in this scene when Macbeth descends the stair with his bloody hands, and she welcomes him with question on question, and wears away his misery with bold encouragement. We are so enthralled, that we start with as much terror as they, when the knocking comes at the south entry. The awe of crime, the darkening vengeance of coming justice, the devastation of the soul by fear, the boldness of accomplished sin reacting against fear, the awful, silent solitude of the mind after the irreparable deed—

Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

rise out of the words of the dialogue like phantoms. This is the true supernatural.

The knocking awakes the Porter, round whose speech so much controversy has taken place. I cannot see why it should not be from Shakespeare's hand. It seems, indeed, to jar with the tragic height of the last scene. But Shakespeare was not only an idealist in his work, but also a bold realist; and it is one of his excellences as a dramatist that his most ideal representations rest on a basis of reality. Even in the tragic height of passion in the last scene, there are such touches of close reality as these—

retire we to our chamber;  
A little water clears us of this deed;

Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us,  
And show us to be watchers.

With such realism underlying the ideal representation of the passion and thoughts in the murderers, the rude realism of the Porter is not out of harmony; nor is the audacious representation of his coarse sensualism, mixed as it is with the bold humour of a drunkard, apart from the savage temper of a time in which the murder of Duncan was possible. There is nothing in his talk and shaping which injures the dramatic impression of the whole. Nay, I am not sure that his total ignorance of what has been done, and the lightness of his talk with Macduff and Lennox, does not make, dramatically, the deed which has been done more ghastly to the audience. They see, behind the rough, ignorant talk, the bloody room and the murdered men.

Then, the Porter's soliloquy, his fancy of himself as porter of Hellgate; his inventive conversation with those who seek admittance into hell; his sudden, drunken turn that he is mistaken; the place is too cold for hell; his disquisition on the effects of drink; his sudden leap into poetic imagination—'that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire'—are all in Shakespeare's manner and invention.<sup>1</sup> I do not believe there was another Elizabethan dramatist who could have written this.

Dramatically considered, the whole passage down to the entrance of Macbeth lowers the pitch of the last scene, and wisely. It enables Shakespeare to climb easily, and with gradation, through the heightening description of the storm of the night, to another climax—the great scene of the discovery of the murder of Duncan. There is nothing in the play which is more fit

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare had used this thought before. The clown in *All's Well that Ends Well* tells Lafeu—

I am for the house with the narrow gate, which I take to be too little for pomp to enter: some that humble themselves may; but the many will be too chill and tender, and they'll be for the flowery way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire.

to the moment and finer in execution than the shouting of Macduff to the sleepers in the castle ;

Awake ! awake !  
 Ring the alarum bell. Murder and treason !  
 Banquo and Donalbain ! Malcolm ! awake !  
 Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,  
 And look on death itself ! up, up, and see  
 The great doom's image ! Malcolm ! Banquo !  
 As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,  
 To countenance this horror ! Ring the bell.

One after another, with dramatic effect carefully arranged for each, the main characters now rush in and fill the court of the castle : Lady Macbeth, Banquo, Macbeth and Lennox again, Malcolm and Donalbain. There is that which is terrible in Lady Macbeth's phrase when Macduff cries to Banquo, ' Our royal master's murdered ' !

Woe, alas !  
 What ! in our house ?

and in Banquo's answer—' Too cruel anywhere.' There is that which is still more terrible in the awful change, on which I must hereafter dwell, in Macbeth's character, in the cool, deliberate hypocrisy of his temper, in the well-sustained apartness from the crime, the poetic turn, as of an orator over the honoured dead, of all he says—

Had I but died an hour before this chance  
 I had liv'd a blessed time ; for, from this instant,  
 There's nothing serious in mortality,  
 All is but toys ; renown and grace is dead,  
 The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees  
 Is left this vault to brag of.

The difference of the temper of the character who makes these fine phrases from his temper of the night of the murder is immense. It is as firm, as settled, as cool, as it was wavering, hot and fearful. Nothing but what is supernatural can shake it again.

The centre of the play has now come. Macbeth has reached the crown. As yet he has not begun to fall. His

fall begins with the murder of Banquo. The preparation for that begins the third act; and Banquo's speech, which introduces it, makes clear the danger he is to Macbeth, and motives his murder. Macbeth's soliloquy reveals this fear, and, to knit the future to the past, Shakespeare again brings in the prophecy of the witches as still exercising its evil power over the soul of Macbeth. 'Banquo's children shall be kings. It shall not be. He and his son shall die.' The interview with the murderers in its chill unflinching wickedness is not half so dreadful as the interview with his wife that follows it, where he is ready to dissolve the whole frame of things rather than not secure himself in his seat, where he thinks of the death of Duncan as a mercy to Duncan, now relieved from all the distress and trouble of the world.

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,  
 Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep  
 In the affliction of these terrible dreams  
 That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,  
 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,  
 Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
 In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;  
 After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;  
 Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,  
 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing  
 Can touch him further.

'Be jocund,' he cries to her, in an appalling mirth;  
 this night 'shall see a deed of dreadful note.'

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
 Till thou applaud the deed.

An awful partnership!

Banquo is slain. It is the middle of the third act, and the end of that central period of the play during which Macbeth has kept his sovereign place. From that moment his doom darkens down day after day till it is accomplished.

The conduct of the play has been, up to this point, my consideration. I turn now to the main characters; and as Banquo drops here out of the play, I take him first. There could be no better foil than he to Macbeth. It is against his white background that Macbeth stands out blacker than night. He is, by Macbeth's own testimony, as brave as Macbeth, as good a soldier. He does not care for money or high place, but he does care for a soldier's fame. No jealousy of Macbeth corrodes his soul, nor has he any suspicion at first of evil thought in his comrade. Good himself, all are good to him, till their guilt is clear. Without ambition for himself, he is yet in the simplest way pleased frankly with the notion of his descendants being kings, but his sensitive conscience forces him to distrust this prophecy of the witches. He feels, by this sensitiveness, that they are evil, and he rests on the truism—that from evil arises no good. Only once afterwards does the prophecy enter his mind. He has put it aside.<sup>1</sup> Because of this alert distrust of evil, he warns Macbeth against thinking of what the witches say. So delicate is his conscience that he prays, before he sleeps, against the cursed thoughts that nature, when the will is in abeyance, gives way to in repose.

Banquo, with this keen, clear conscience, trembling to anger against even the suggestion of evil, is set over against Macbeth, whose only conscience is his sense of honour. And that gives way after a struggle at the call of his ambition. But Banquo's sense of a soldier's honour is backed up by the strength of his conscience; and

<sup>1</sup> When he finds (Act III.) that Macbeth has gained all the Weird Women promised, but by the foulest play, he thinks again of their prophecy. They have told truth to Macbeth. 'They may have told truth to me. If so, my children will be kings.' There's no evil in that thought, no selfishness. He would not play foully for any success. He thinks only of what will be when he is dead, of the honourable hope that he may father a great posterity. 'Tis an innocent thought.

when Macbeth tempts him with promises of greatness, he answers—

So I lose none  
In seeking to augment it, but still keep  
My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear,  
I shall be counsell'd.

Macbeth hears, and cannot endure this conscientiousness. It is a ceaseless menace, and it settles Banquo's fate. Indeed, he is too good for a rough world; he is sure to perish in contact with an evil will. Along with this clear conscience is a clear intellect. They sometimes, not always, go together. Here both, acting together, set free Banquo from superstition, and again put him into contrast with Macbeth who is superstition's slave—a contrast meant by Shakespeare. Banquo has no illusive dreams, sees no ghosts, has no supernatural terrors. He faces the witches boldly, and gives no credit to their prophecies. They may not be dwellers on the earth, but that is no matter. His soul is free from fear. He questions them as if they were natural. If they are supernatural, he will neither beg their favours nor their hate. When they vanish, he thinks his reason has been for a moment taken prisoner, so full of clear good sense is his mind. He argues that the devil cannot tell truth; and when he finds that these evil ministers have told the fact as it is, his conscience helps his intellect to see the under-truth—that the fiend may tell what is true to betray us to ambition's harm—the very thing which at that moment is working in the mind of Macbeth. Of course, after the murder of Duncan, Macbeth had to get rid of this clear-sighted man, whose intelligence was as dangerous as his conscience.

Lastly, we have seen him only as the soldier of a rude age, with a conscience touched to finer issues than was common at the time. Shakespeare, to complete his sketch of a noble character, adds to it a love of natural beauty,



a tender observation of things delicate. Banquo combines with his sensitiveness of conscience sensitiveness to beauty. We expect from Duncan's gentle character these gentle words—

This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air  
Nimble and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

But we scarcely expect from Banquo those fine perceptive verses which reveal how often he had observed and loved the fair things of the outward world :

This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
By his lov'd mansionry that the heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here : no jutting, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle :  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd  
The air is delicate.

It is a lovely passage, done with Shakespeare's most magical finger. He draws it forth from the high recesses of Banquo's soul, and it belongs to his careful purity. Compare it with what Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, charged with the dark thoughts in their souls, see in nature. She cries

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements.

Macbeth, planning the murder of Banquo in his black soul, sees all things black.

Come, seeling night,  
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,  
And with thy bloody and invisible hand  
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond  
Which keeps me pale ! Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood ;  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,

The only point at which Banquo and Macbeth are at one is, that both are good soldiers, brave, and jealous of

the point of honour; but Banquo's honour, being united to an active conscience, remains untainted; while Macbeth's breaks down fatally.

Macbeth is the bold soldier of a rude time. We must not apply to his actions, if we would conceive him as Shakespeare conceived him, the standards of our time, especially in the matter of killing. He was accustomed to slaughter, and the mere slaying of Duncan, Banquo, and Fleance was nothing to him. When a man stood opposed to the aims of a soldier of that date, unless he had like Banquo a delicate conscience, he slew his enemy at once, in the shortest and surest way. Stone dead has no fellow. Killing was Macbeth's trade; assassination of an obstacle caused him no remorse. But though mere killing or murder did not trouble his mind, it did trouble him when it violated his code of honour. The killing of Duncan, under the circumstances, was such a violation. In that famous speech beginning

If it were done when 'tis done,

he does not dwell on the guilt of murder, but first on the penalties which follow it. These he fears; if there were no punishment, no return of blood for blood, here on this earth, it is little I would think of the life to come. I'd take the risk of that. Then, secondly, he dwells on the dishonour to him of the murder. To slay one who is in my castle in double trust violates all the laws of honour. Duncan is my kinsman, I am his subject, and he has done me kindness. Duncan is my guest, under the shelter of my roof. This is not the cry of conscience, but of the common code of honour. Then he thinks again of the consequences. Duncan has been so good, so gentle a king that his virtues will plead like trumpet-tongued angels against my deed, and pity for his fate awake the tears of the world. This too is not his personal conscience speak-

ing; it is partly that it jars honour to slay so excellent a chief, and partly it is fear of the results.

This sense of honour in Macbeth, frequently a man's only conscience, disappears altogether after the murder of Duncan. He has irredeemably violated it, and it never has another shred of influence upon him. Moreover, since nothing isolates a man like the loss of honour, Macbeth is henceforth separated by Shakespeare from the whole of his world, except from his comrade in the murder. He is isolated also from his earlier self, from the honourable soldier that he was; he is an outlaw to himself.

To know my deed were best not know myself.

And the loss of his honour makes him absolutely reckless. No crime, after his great crime, in which he murdered his own honour, seems more than a trifle to him. He dooms, in savage petulance, the wife and children of Macduff to an innocent and useless death.

On the whole, if we would see Macbeth clearly we must not dwell on his conscience, of which so much is made, but on his sense of honour. They are, of course, related to one another, but the realm of each is quite distinct. Were it conscience that troubled him he would have been pictured by Shakespeare as a victim of remorse, like Lady Macbeth. There is no remorse in him, but there is the wild, indifferent recklessness which comes to one who is conscious that he has shut himself out from his fellows by a fatal act of dishonour. And when we think of this, that pathetic statement of his case in Act v., which is not at all the cry a remorseful conscience would make, seems naturally in harmony with his self-consciousness. It is what a dishonoured gentleman, even now, might say.

I have liv'd long enough : my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf ;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have ; but, in their stead,  
 Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath  
 Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

Again, Macbeth is described by a modern critic as the type of the practical man, not imaginative; who knows himself; who knows his purpose, and goes straight to it by the shortest way. I do not think any description can be further from the reality, *before his murder of Duncan*. Even after the murder this description is only partially true. I suppose his wife was aware of his character, and this was not her view of him. The very contrary was her experience. 'Infirm of purpose,' she cries, at the very top of the event, 'give me the daggers.'

Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour  
 As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that  
 Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life  
 And live a coward in thine own esteem,  
 Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'  
 Like the poor cat i' the adage?

This is not the swift-acting, practical man. He hovers to and fro; now ambition seizes him, now fear. He wants much, but dreads to take the straight way to it. He's soft by nature in one part of him, and lets the weaker part of him tyrannise over his bolder thoughts. He needs his wife's quicker, bolder, more practical nature to heighten him into audacious, rapid action. This is her view of his character; and till after the murder, it is the character Shakespeare meant him to have. That is plain from Lady Macbeth's description of him in her first speech in the play.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
 What thou art promis'd. Yet do I fear thy nature;  
 It is too full of the milk o' human-kindness  
 To catch the nearest way; thou wouldst be great,  
 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it; what thou wouldst highly,  
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,

And yet wouldst wrongly win ; thou'dst have, great Glamis,  
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it';  
And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crown'd withal.

All through the murder scene Macbeth remains this character. He wavers, through over-thinking of it, before the deed; now cold, now all on fire. He needs his wife's scorn to spur him to the act. He piles up extravagant words about it till he feels himself that he is chilling by words his purpose. He loses his head in the horror of the murder, when it is done, considering it too deeply for sanity. His brain is sick; every noise appals him. The blood of his hands seems to stain the universe. He is lost in fear; he thinks he will never sleep again. His wife is tender to him, but is shamed for his white heart. This is not the practical, swift, purposeful man, but one wildly troubled by imagination, doubling and trebling, through a host of images, the terror and hate of what he has done.

Imagination—that is his trouble! I do not know whether this salient element in his character has been much dwelt on. It ought to be. We cannot understand Macbeth without realising it. Indeed, it is this lively, shaping, various imagination, continually multiplying new aspects of anything to be done, or that has been done, which is at the root of his hesitations, his fears, his outbursts of agony. His wife has none of it, but brings her impulsive common-sense to meet it, check it, and dissolve it. Her cool reasoning face to face with the imagination which has overwhelmed his intellect is one of the most remarkable and dramatic contrasts Shakespeare has conceived. She pulls him out of fantasy into reality. He slips back; she drags him out again.

Macbeth, as Shakespeare saw him, was instinct with imagination. Had he not been a soldier and cousin of the king, had he lived in a less rude time, and in a private gentleman's condition, he might have had the poet's name. Everything he says in this play is poetically said, cast in keen imagination's mould, thought and form equally good; and rising easily, at times of great emotion, into words equal to the emotion. The conception, for example, of all the oceans of the world incarnadined by the blood on his hand is equally magnificent in passion, conception, and execution. Even his common phrases are couched in poetry.<sup>1</sup> The ideal his imagination laid before him was to be king, to wear the golden top of sovereignty. In comparison with this ideal and its imaginative charm, all its material advantages were as nothing in his mind. Lady Macbeth alludes to these. He does not.

Before, during, and after the murder, this imagination, blown into a white heat by the intense passion of the hour, is so alive and powerful that it doubles the horror of the murder. It lifts it out of a vulgar assassination into the archetype of all terrible, soul-shaking murders. It flies from heaven to earth and down to hell. It sees an air-drawn dagger, 'a metaphysical dagger of the working soul,' pointing him to Duncan's chamber. It blackens all Nature with his thought. It drags in the remotest things to increase the terror of the present—Hecate, Tarquin whose strides towards his design are like those of withered murder with her sentinel the wolf. In the very midst of his slaughter he hears a voice, 'Sleep no more! Macbeth

<sup>1</sup> Can such things be  
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,  
Without our special wonder?

Of course, as in tragic work, the other characters speak poetically, but none of them approach in speech the continuity, the depth, and the passion of Macbeth's imagination.

does murder sleep,' and at the word his imagination takes fire, and runs away from the horror of the moment into all the poetry of sleep—strange island of peaceful imagination in this sea of murder—

the innocent sleep,  
 Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
 The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
 Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
 Chief nourisher in life's feast,—

There speaks the natural poet. Lady Macbeth, who has none of this imagination, cannot comprehend this divagation. 'What do you mean?' she says. 'Who was it that thus cried?' He is the same throughout. He adds more than an imaginative, I may say an artist's, touch to everything he says. Matter, passion, and form are equally good. He is always mixing up his deeds and himself with the whole of Nature. In his mind Nature, dark Nature, sympathises with him. The heavens, the solid earth, the sea, are companions of his thoughts. He makes them his by universalising himself into them, and with them—a common element in poets. Even at the end when, driven to bay, he feels that all is over, and meets his coming fate with reckless courage and weariness of life, he is still poetic in the hours of his loneliness. Few soliloquies are richer in imagination and humanity than his are in the fifth act.

We cannot understand Shakespeare's Macbeth till we realise this element of poetic imagination in him. It lifts him above the brutal murderer. Yet it makes his ruthlessness more abominable. The artist who is bloodthirsty and cruel is not unknown to history. Art and savagery are often ugly lovers.

This great imaginative power in a rude and ignorant time, and in a man who had no natural opportunity of expressing it in its proper forms, was sure to have, as its child, not only superstition, which is ignorant imagination

in a wrong place, but also the fears which accompany superstition. Shakespeare lays this deep in Macbeth's temperament. Its presence is one of the main keys to his thoughts and acts. Conscious of it himself, he describes its keen and nervous thrill of mingled curiosity and fear when he was a boy, even a man.

The time has been my senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
As life were in 't.

What seems supernatural sets at once his nerves into a storm. It appears strangely in a brave soldier, but there are many examples of this co-existence of physical courage and metaphysical terrors in the same man. We see how close the imaginative nerve-storm is to Macbeth, when the first suggestion of Duncan's murder makes his hair rise, and his heart knock at his ribs, against the use of nature.

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.

All the visible world has perished to him. Only the fierce invisible thought is real. So intensely strained is imagination that it breaks into fear when the murder is at hand; afraid as a child of his own fears. 'If we should fail,' he cries, almost like a coward. He sees the dagger he cannot feel marshalling him to murder. He sees it again black with gout of blood. He thinks the stones of his castle will prate of his whereabouts. He hears voices in the air. He is afraid to think of what he has done; he dare not look upon it. His wife has no patience with his superstitious nerves. His eyes are those of a child, which, unchecked by reason, believe all they imagine they see.



The sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures : 'tis the eye of childhood  
That fears a painted devil.

Into that grey world of the supernatural which some are said to see, Macbeth is continually carried. Terrible dreams shake him nightly with fear. It is only he that sees the ghost of Banquo rise, the very painting of his imaginative dread. His courage is proof against any mortal foe, his nerves firm against any natural horror, but not against the immortal, the supernatural. Then his cheek is blanched by terror. As time goes on, when he is no longer young in murder, the initiate fear declines; but though the fear has gone, the superstition remains. He believes the witches. He is still the slave of their will to ruin him. The apparitions they make him see cause him now no dread, but he listens to them as if they were true prophets. His superstition has bred credulity; and out of his false security partly arises the half-insane recklessness with which he presses on to meet his fate.

These keys unlock the man. On such a temperament, naturally brave, supernaturally fearful; weak in resolve, strong in imagination; a rude soldier with a poet's heart; honourable, but not having any moral foundation for his honour, without the conscience which is honour's guard; his honour only the custom of his class—on such a temperament falls the heavy temptation of ambition. He has nursed the thought of being king; he has talked it over, it is plain, with his wife. She has taken the same infection. The witches suggest outwardly his inward ambition. The dreadful means to reach it dawns upon him, but he has not yet formed it into Duncan's murder. Duncan's proclamation of his son as his heir swells his thought into a kind of rage till he is on the edge of murder. Then unlooked-for opportunity comes to him. Duncan will sleep at his castle. Murder springs

now into his mind. The means, the time, are given him. His wife hears that news. And in her also murder on the opportunity leaps into swift life. Duncan, in the minds of both, is dead already. The long-cherished forces of various thoughts, leading to one thought, explode into form.

MACB. My dearest love,  
Duncan comes here to-night.

LADY M. And when goes hence ?

MACB. To-morrow as he purposes.

LADY M. O ! never

Shall sun that morrow see !

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men

May read strange matters. To beguile the time,

Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eye,

Your hand, your tongue : look like the innocent flower,

But be the serpent under't. He that's coming

Must be provided for : and you shall put

This night's great business into my dispatch ;

Which shall to all our nights and days to come

Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

MACB. We will speak further.

LADY M. Only look up clear ;

To alter favour ever is to fear :

Leave all the rest to me.

And he does leave it to her. He is but the hand which does the murder. She is the impelling soul of it, the incarnate slaughter. She lifts his weakness into strength, his fears into courage ; opposes her reason to his fears, her common-sense to his imaginings. She spends as much force and intelligence to have her own wild will, as would have enabled her to do good to the whole of Scotland. It is impossible not to admire her strength when we set aside the evil to which she puts it.

The penalty of an evil passion is that it harnesses to its car, and degrades, the original goodness of a character. Had Lady Macbeth been thrown by circumstances into a right way, or had her passion been a noble one, she had very swiftly learnt goodness. For, unlike her husband,

she could develop a conscience. He had no remorse; she had. It rose in her when the tempest of her desire was over, its impulse dead. Nor was she heartless, save in the rage of her impulse.

Lady Macbeth, as Shakespeare conceived her, was not by nature a bad woman, but a woman who became bad by long cherishing of ambition for the crown. This desire, not an impossible one for Macbeth had some pretensions to the crown, was made much stronger by that which was good in her—by her love for her husband. This whiff of goodness mixes with the murder. It is plain that these two, even in crime, loved one another well, and had been closely knit together. Macbeth knew her strength and loved her, before the murder, more than she loved him. She knew his weakness in action, weakness through over-thinking, over-imagination; but she loved the man, and perhaps all the more that his weakness enabled her to feel her own power when she kindled him to act, and defended him in trouble. When she inspirits him to the murder, we are repelled, even when we are surprised into a strange admiration; but when she guards him, in his weakness on the apparition of Banquo, she awakens our emotional interest and our pity. But, at that time, the overwhelming impulse which momentarily drove her to murder has departed from her. She has passed into the reaction from it, and the natural good in her character, undeveloped as it had been, has begun to emerge. When we next see her, in the sleep-walking scene, she is the thrall of avenging conscience and of womanly horror for her deed. And finally, in another rush of unregulated impulse, she lays violent hands on herself, for the conscience Macbeth has not she has now developed.

She is then, from the time she receives Macbeth's letter and hears that Duncan is coming that night to the castle, the victim of one of those unbridled impulses

whose outburst, like that of a volcano, is the result of inward thoughts and passions directed to one end, increasing during years of silence, and at last reaching their highest point of expansion. A single touch, a sudden chance, and they explode into irresistible and transient energy. In some women, in whom the love of power is supreme, and whose intellect is cold if their passions are hot, such an impulse of passion—of love or jealousy, of ambition, hatred or fear—is, for the time, their only law. For them, in this sudden outburst into form of long-nurtured thoughts—each making its own passion, each unrepressed but its outward shaping repressed—everything else but the impulse to fulfil their desire disappears. Earth and heaven flee away, and there is no place for them. Honour, duty, the claims of the affections, motherhood, friendship, morality, the conventions of society, all the ties of the past, are counted as dust in the balance in comparison with the attainment of their will. The emotion is so intense that, while it lasts, it lifts them above nature, above the natural feeling and restraints of their sex. They are capable of saying things which violate even the first instincts of nature, such as this—

I have given suck, and know  
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me :  
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
 Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,  
 And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you  
 Have done to this.

One thing, the impulse, whatever it be, is the despot of the whole character; and the unity of the force employed, utterly unmodified by any other element, makes its energy overwhelming. Macbeth and his objections were as soft clay in a furious potter's hand before the whirling wheel of his wife's illimitable impulse.

The known characteristic of such an impulse is that it

arises suddenly into action, and is quickly exhausted. It came on Lady Macbeth in a moment on the reception of Macbeth's letter. That voiced the possibility of the hopes being realised over which she had brooded for so long, and the wild image of the reality seized on her brain. But, at first, no clear opportunity is given. Then comes the news that Duncan is coming to spend the night at her castle, and the full fury of her impulse falls upon her. She sees, hears, feels nothing but the death of the king. We hear the all-consuming tyranny of her desire in the low cry she utters when the messenger tells her, 'The king comes here to-night! Thou'rt mad to say it' is the voice her inward passion wrings from her. Then follows the whispered intensity of the scene which begins with

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements.

When Macbeth enters, the impulse is doubled by her love of him, by her consciousness that in his thought he is at one with her. She receives him with the rapture of her desire. She sees him already slaying Duncan. The present has perished; she lives in the future; she is in a whirlwind of terrible hope.

Thy letters have transported me beyond  
This ignorant present, and I feel now  
The future in the instant.

This transporting passion never fails during the murderous night. All Macbeth's hesitations go down before it. She uses all a woman's weapons. She denies her motherhood's tenderness, though she knows she is false to herself, as she is when outside of the storm on which she is borne away. She mocks him with bitter sarcasm. He is untrue to himself and a coward. Her very love for him, as he resists, momentarily fades away. To support the

impulse, when at the instant of the murder it lessens through the stress of horror, she drinks of the spirit with which she has drenched the grooms—

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold ;  
What hath quench'd them hath given me fire.

Had Duncan not resembled her father as he slept—strange, yet natural moment of recurrence to old affectionateness—she herself had stabbed him. Nothing is impossible in the whirl of the impulse.

Not till the murder is done does the force of the impulse begin to diminish. When she sees Macbeth in a tremble of imaginative terror, touched by superstitious horror, his phantasies (though she supports, uplifts, and encourages him) begin to bring on the reaction. Its first note is

These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways ; so, it will make us mad.

But this is only the beginning. She is still in the rush of her desire. She knits her energies to the needs of the hour, opposes her reason to his fancies, bids him be practical, wash his hands, get on his nightgown, go to his bed. She takes the daggers, sees without a tremor the murdered man, makes bloody the faces of the grooms, and comes back to say

A little water clears us of this deed ; . . .  
Be not lost  
So poorly in your thoughts.

No impulse, borne to so wild a height as hers had been, could continue at that height. There was a certainty of reaction. Macbeth, on the contrary, had not been so borne away. He had resisted his wife's pleading; he had done what he had done in fear and trembling; he had yielded to her with many reasonings and difficulties. At last he had done the deed in cold horror, hearing a dreadful voice—Sleep no more. He too

would suffer a reaction, but it would take an opposite form to that which hers would take. And, true enough, next day their rôles are entirely changed. Macbeth, having exhausted all his objections, all his fears, and having irreparably committed his murder, is absolutely changed from the trembling, reasoning, white-hearted personage of the murder scene. He is cool, determined, quick in action, ruthless, fearless, save when, seeing the ghost of Banquo, the superstitious fear native to him from his childhood grips him for a time. No one suspects him but Duncan's sons. He sticks at nothing, murders the servants to put the deed upon them and to hide their evidence, covers blood with blood, describes with a ghastly poetry Duncan's body, and acts as swiftly as the lightning. Before his purpose cools he does the deed he projects, even though it means the needless murder of such innocent folk as the wife and children of Macduff.

For mine own good

All causes shall give way: I am in blood  
Stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook  
Unless the deed go with it; from this moment  
The very firstlings of my heart shall be  
The firstlings of my hand. . . .

No boasting like a fool;

This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool:  
But no more sights!

No change can be greater. We look upon another man.

As great a change comes upon Lady Macbeth. The storm of impulse is over. She has slept it away, or it has died in the silent sleeplessness of that dreadful dawn before the great cry came which brought her down to face the terror-stricken crowd, and to faint away. She

has wakened to the horror of what she has done; and she returns to her natural self—as she was, before the temptation she had long cherished rose into fierce action, and transported her beyond herself. She is a wholly different woman, when she comes down in the morning, from the woman of the night before. Macduff has called her a ‘gentle lady,’ and something of this gentleness emerges. When Macbeth, bolder and cooler than thrice-tempered steel, describes Duncan, his ‘silver skin laced with his golden blood,’ in the strange play of his poetic imagination—describes what he and she have done—she cannot bear it; she faints away. Some have said that the swoon was pretended. That is foolish; there is no reason in Shakespeare for such a suggestion. Even if nothing of her natural womanhood were now returning, as I think it was, the terrible strain on her brain and body of the night, and now of the morning’s discovery, are enough to account for her fainting. But there was more in it than that. What appears afterwards in her sleep-walking—the woman’s natural horror of the bloody deed—had already begun to move in her. Then all through the scene where the ghost of Banquo rises, her words, even when they reproach Macbeth and sting him into courage, have so much tenderness breaking through them, her defence of him to the lords is so anxious, so wistful, that it is impossible not to pity her, to feel kindly for her. She says nothing ill, nothing unwomanly, but wisely, with clear sense, clear intelligence, and courage, in her guarding of Macbeth. Those great qualities she yet retains, and they serve well her love, and the piteous comradeship in crime of these two isolated souls. When the guests depart, and Macbeth alone with her gives vent to the fears he has—but only when the supernatural thrills his nerves—and swears that he will drown them in the slaughter of all whom he suspects, there is a worn



pathetic cry, half for herself, half for him, in the words with which she answers him ;

You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

They are all the more pathetic when we find afterwards that sleep could not soothe her miserable misery. She is changed indeed.

Moreover, her conscience now begins to awake. She dwells on the irreparableness of what they have done.

How now, my lord ! why do you keep alone,  
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,  
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died  
With them they think on ? Things without all remedy  
Should be without regard : what's done is done.

She repeats this in her sleep—'What's done cannot be undone.' It is only the awakened conscience which dwells on the irreparable past. Macbeth does not. He seeks only to secure the future. She lives in the ghastliness of the past. When she is alone, for with her husband she is always brave, we hear how deep the arrow of remorse has pierced.

Nought's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content :  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

The only wicked thing she says—but she says it to back up her husband when he tells of the scorpion-thought that Banquo and Fleance still live—is wicked indeed.

But in them nature's copy's not eterne.

'There's comfort,' cries Macbeth, but we cannot argue from this one wicked phrase to a total searing of her conscience, especially when we find that this very slaughter of Banquo forms part of her agony in sleep.

That dreadful vision of her soul tells us what a profound change has taken place in her since the murder. Her natural womanhood and her conscience are both

alive in her sleep-walking, and she voices in it the thoughts of the day. Night after night she lives over again the murder of Duncan, of Banquo, of Macduff's wife and children. These deeds sit heavy on her soul, and among them are her own urgings to Macbeth that make her feel she has been even guiltier than he. There is a piteousness in her words wholly unlike what she was before the murder.

Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. . . . The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now? What! will these hands ne'er be clean? . . . Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!

This woman is, like Macbeth, but how differently, all changed. Her conscience and her womanhood slay her. She dies by her own hand.

The reason of this astonishing change in the feeling and action of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, both moving in an opposite direction to that in which they moved before the murder, may be found in a general difference between man and woman; a sex-difference which, always existing in ordinary life, does not plainly appear until they are placed together in extraordinary circumstances, such as a sudden temptation or a strong impulse of passion. We can discuss this difference in the case of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, for the one was wholly a man and the other wholly a woman. I have already said that sex in Shakespeare is always normal.

The general difference is this. In a man emotion rarely exists without thought being exercised upon it. Any passionate desire, like Macbeth's temptation to slay Duncan in order to gain the throne, is accompanied by an intellectual discussion of its reasons, its difficulties, and its consequences. They are entered into before the temptation is yielded to, or the impulse followed. Every

emotion is bound up with its thoughts, and every thought with its emotions, like two clasped hands.

But in a woman it is not so, whenever passion or intellect is dominant in her. If her intellect be dominant, it acts, and governs her actions alone, without any emotion accompanying it. If her passion dominate, it also acts alone without any thought mixed up with it. No reasoning, no discussion of objections or results, such as Macbeth indulged in, accompanies the execution of her desire.

Lady Macbeth, in the whirl of her impulse, saw no objections to the murder of Duncan. No sense of honour, no scruples of conscience, no womanly feelings, intervened to stay her will. Her intellect and what sense of right or wrong she may have had do not exist for the time. She acts as unself-restrained as a law of nature. Macbeth, on the contrary, sees all the objections, reasons out the whole question, considers that he risks his soul and stains his honour black, looks the consequences in the face and fears them, understands his peril and his crime beforehand, and deliberately, with his reason seeing all these matters clearly, fulfils his passionate desire, executes his murder. Of all this there is not a trace in Lady Macbeth on the night of the slaughter.

It is easy now to explain the change. When the furious wind of her passion had died away, all the thoughts Lady Macbeth's passion had concealed from her, now rushed upon her, weakened by the storm. The fears, the doubts her husband had, beset her now when her deed is irreparable; the violation of her roof-tree, the gentleness and trust of Duncan, the horror of blood, the dreadful consequences, the battering of awakened conscience and she breaks down into mortal ruin. Moreover, the momentary loss of her womanhood, of all tenderness, the unsexing of herself in the intensity of her impulse, are avenged by that return of her womanhood

which is disclosed to us when sleep has loosened her self-control.

But Macbeth has faced beforehand all the consequences, has seen his crime in all its bearings. He has met and put aside, before he has committed the murder, all that his reason, and the sense of honour which serves him for conscience, can urge against his crime. He has seen the results and accepted them. When they come, they are already discounted. After their fever they sleep well, as well as Duncan. Therefore he is cool, indifferent to his guilt, ready at all points to meet what he has already presaged; quite free from all self-reproach, as reckless now as he was before anxious. Having once steeped his hands in blood, he cares for no after-slaughters—ruthless, physically undaunted, no whiteness now in his heart. And his reason turns now, not to object to crime, but to organise fresh crime in order to clear and secure his position. Even his superstitious fears, when the vision of Banquo has ceased, are dispersed. He has supped full of horrors, and they trouble him no more. He faces the witches and their apparitions, even that of Banquo, as if he were one of themselves. This is the difference between the man and the woman.

I have sketched the conduct of the play up to the coronation. The death of Banquo is the doubling of crime, and from it dates the ruin of Macbeth. Inwardly, it began with the murder of Duncan, but the murder of Banquo begins it outwardly. The apparition of Banquo shakes his imagination into terror, and in order to bluff his fear, he exalts his will to 'wade' deeper into blood. He is, he cries, in a wild excitement for murder, 'yet but young in deed.' He will go to see the Weird Sisters and know the worst. And now the witches reappear, and Hecate bids them by further illusion draw Macbeth on to his confusion. These scenes are by some taken away

from Shakespeare. I should like to know who else could have written them. The vaporous drop profound which hangs on the corner of the moon, and which Hecate distils to raise the sprites which confuse Macbeth, is not from any other imagination than Shakespeare's. If the cauldron and its ingredients are borrowed from the witch-books, the form and execution of the whole are of so weird and potent a grotesque, that we feel in the actual presence of high ministers of evil, at the very 'pit of Acheron.' Nor are the things done and shown, or the cauldron and its ingredients real. They are illusion, and they vanish into air. They are to act on the soul of Macbeth, to ruin him by false security. He knows at the end that they were juggling fiends

That palter with us in a double sense ;  
That keep the word of promise to the ear,  
And break it to our hope.

Dramatically, their promises contain the rest of Macbeth's action and his death.

Meantime, we have heard of Macduff's flight to England, and of Macbeth's rage at this news. And the two next scenes belong closely to this news. We find Lady Macduff in her castle at Fife complaining of her husband's desertion. He loves us not:

He wants the natural touch ; for the poor wren,  
The most diminutive of birds, will fight—  
Her young ones in her nest—against the owl.  
All is the fear and nothing is the love ;

She does not understand the policy which, wise for the kingdom, is not wise for her. And indeed she is right. Macduff had probably killed her love. 'Sirrah, your father's dead,' she tells her son. Whatever petulant impatience of the moment may be in her cry, I do not think she would have ever forgiven her husband. Ross defends him, but Ross and all those who defend him

do not know a woman; nor do they see that Macduff, who is honest, politic, brave, is yet of a weak intellect. He made, with excellent intentions, a grave mistake in abandoning his wife to the power of a man whose wicked ruthlessness he knew. And the mistake has two results. One is that Malcolm suspects him of treachery. He cannot understand the 'rawness with which he left his wife and child. He has been untrue to them; is he untrue to me?' The other result is the slaughter of his home. It is absurd to say that Macduff is punished, as some say. There is no moral guilt in his action. It is an error, but errors have the nature of vices, and Shakespeare remembers that curious truth from play to play. Indeed this short sketch of Macduff's conduct, its result on his wife, and on the action of the play, is an admirable example of Shakespeare's careful work on his less important characters.

The scene before the king's palace in England is taken up with these two results. We feel the weakness of Macduff when he excuses, for the sake of policy, all the villainies with which Malcolm loads his own character. It is only when Malcolm paints himself as the foe of all unity and peace, that honesty in Macduff breaks loose from policy.

Fit to govern!

No, not to live.

They are reconciled, and an episode of a doctor and a history of King Edward curing the king's evil is dragged in. The whole scene, I have said already, grossly delays the action, and is quite unnecessary. It ought to have been omitted. It is only when Ross comes in, that the movement is again afoot. The tenderness and pathetic beauty of the passages when the bold warrior is smitten down with the news of his slaughtered home are an island of grace in the midst of this ocean of blood.

The overwhelming stress of our feelings is relieved by its nobleness.

Then follows the sleep-walking scene; and the fall of Lady Macbeth is revealed to us. She reaches her ruin through the terrible depression of the reaction from the fierce impulse which slaughtered Duncan. We are first shown its work on the night when Banquo is murdered. She keeps up her strength to defend her husband, but when she is alone with him, she is utterly exhausted. And now, when she walks in her sleep, her soul is laid bare. The hopeless misery of her quick-coming fancies, all of them crimsoned and horrible with blood, is eating away her life. The great cry of her women, at the moment when Macbeth realises that he is face to face with his foes, tells us that she is gone. Poor soul! weak through want of will to curb the impulse of passion, she recurs, when the passion which made her strong to do evil and for the time supreme in tragedy has passed away, to her original weakness and dies by her own hand.

And now we are left alone with Macbeth, and he is alone with himself. He is as exalted as his wife is depressed. The murder has opposite results on each of them, and I have tried to explain the reason of this.

He is quite reckless—almost in the same temper in which his wife was just before the murder of Duncan. This recklessness has grown from the days when he sacrificed Banquo because he feared his royalty of nature and his wisdom, because it was bitter as death to him that Banquo's issue, while he was childless, should be kings. It has grown still more since the dreadful night when he saw Banquo rise and glare into his eyes. When that vision passed him by, its only result was to exalt his transient terror into so intense a rage that while the vision of Banquo's heirs sears his eyeballs, he looks now untremblingly at Banquo himself, whose blood-

boltered visage smiles upon him. As the danger from without increases, his distempered excitement increases, till it issues in that which seems to some a valiant fury, to others madness. The valiancy of his recklessness is supported by his faith in the promises of the witches; he is safe till Birnam wood shall come to Dunsinane, till he meet an enemy not born of woman. He is always brave, but this credulity makes him speak like a swash-buckler at the very hour when his mind tells him his cause is lost.

Another element in him is physical. Macbeth's nerves, as we have seen, are always thrilling. Now, of course, when doom is gathering thick around him, they are worse than before. They must be like harp-strings overstrung. The effort to repress their cry intensifies the storm. Hence his shouting, his wild cries for war, the outbreaks of uncontrolled and furious speech to the servants—

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon !

Outward furies like this tell of the raging of the nerve-storm within. It bursts into anger with the slightest things; with a servant's pale face, with a stammering tongue. This is to be on the knife-edge of madness.

The only solace, the only countercheck to this, is in violent acts of war, in preparation for combat.

I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hack'd.  
Give me my armour.

In this condition, so battered, so self-stormed, so isolated in his own fears and in his tempestuous soul, it is no wonder that his love for his wife, though not lost, is dulled, is part of the walking shadow of life. He discusses her illness coolly, almost with a scornful philosophy. She is troubled, says the Doctor, with thick-coming fancies that keep her from her rest.



MACB. Cure her of that :  
 Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,  
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
 Raze out the written troubles of the brain,  
 And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
 Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff  
 Which weighs upon the heart ?

DOCT. Therein the patient  
 Must minister to himself.

MACB. Throw physic to the dogs ; I'll none of it.

When he hears of her death, he only says, 'She should have died hereafter' ; and passes on to think of himself. The freezing shadow of the doom that has enwrapt him has almost frozen his love.

Amid all this conflict of diverse elements, or rather, behind them all, is unspeakable weariness of life—all lost, all done—and with that, an infinite pity for himself, and infinite pity for poor humanity. He transfers, with that sympathy which belongs to a poetic nature, his own failure to all humanity. Life, and all its passions, hopes, and endeavour, are nothing but illusion. When he is alone ; when he gets down, apart from the race of action, into his deepest self ; this raises its head within him. And he expresses it with that strange poetry which, even in physical, mental, and moral ruin, still survives.

Seyton !—I am sick at heart  
 When I behold—Seyton, I say !—This push  
 Will chair me ever, or disseat me now.  
 I have lived long enough : my way of life  
 Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf ;  
 And that which should accompany old age,  
 As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
 I must not look to have.

Still more poetical, of the finest strain—more human, mingling his own life with all the life of humanity—when the cry of women tells him the queen is dead—

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time ;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more ; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

There is Macbeth, deep down. The next moment he is all fire and action. And both the valiant fury of war and the unutterable weariness of life meet in the last thing he says before the last battle.

I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun,  
And wish the estate o' the world were now undone.  
Ring the alarum bell ! Blow wind ! come, wrack !  
At least we'll die with harness on our back.

## VIII

### CORIOLANUS

THIS play was written, probably in 1609, when Shakespeare's genius had fully matured, after he had proved the splendour of his work in the great tragedies—*Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*—and just before he wrote, in his latest period, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. It has been greatly praised, and even compared, for dramatic interest, with *Othello*. For my part, I cannot feel that. Shakespeare's power in it, magnificent in many places, is not so equally distributed as in the greater plays, and the splendid passages make the change of amalgamating power even more remarkable. Then, it is, in a lesser degree than *Richard II.* and *III.*, a one-man play. The figure of Coriolanus, and his fate—of Coriolanus in a twofold relation; to his mother and to the people—dominates almost too overwhelmingly the interest of the rest of the drama. Cominius, Aufidius, Menenius, the tribunes, even the women, except Volumnia, are a little too much in the background. If they had been more fully interwoven with the action, the play would have been closer to human life. It is true, we have a great variety in the crowds and disturbance of Rome, in the scenes at Corioli. The stage is full of the movement and clash of parties. A vivid impression of a crisis between the nobles and the people in a great city is given to us. But when the play is done, and even while we read, we feel as if all the noise, fury, folly, and wisdom of the strife were but a scenery for the overmastering

presentation, first of Coriolanus, and then of Coriolanus and his mother. I think, but with great diffidence, that Shakespeare's power of combination, of giving unity to his play in the midst of a vivid variety, had now lessened; or that he did not take as much pains in this matter as of old. He was not quite the absolute dramatic master he had been. And of the three plays that follow this, midst of all their exquisite beauty, I would say the same. The poetry itself is as lovely as ever, even more lovely than ever before, in these swan-songs of his, but the co-ordinating power is either less or less carefully exercised.

The story of this play, though it is found in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, a book Shakespeare read, was taken by him, with singular cleverness, from the life of Coriolanus in North's Plutarch, and it is worth while to compare the translation with the play, especially in such important passages as the speech of Coriolanus to Aufidius, and the scene between him and his mother in the fifth act, where Shakespeare has often followed North's rendering almost word for word. The title-page acknowledges Shakespeare's indebtedness to that book of Plutarch's, which indeed, for nearly two thousand years, has been an imaginative inspiration in the souls of all eager young men, and a wise, impelling, and thought-stirring power in the lives of statesmen, philosophers, artists, lawmakers, and of heroic souls in every class of men. It is curious to think that, as the mighty spirit of Shakespeare read his Plutarch, he knew that at certain great moments of his play he could say nothing better than Plutarch had said. It is equally curious that this great creator deliberately copied down the words of Caius Marcius to Aufidius, of Volumnia to Coriolanus. This honours alike Shakespeare and Plutarch.

Three matters of interest are prominent in this work of art: (1) Shakespeare's treatment of the political question

in Rome; (2) the character and fate of Coriolanus; (3) Coriolanus and his mother.

Hazlitt says that all has been said in this drama that can be said for both aristocrat and democrat. It is, he adds, a storehouse of political commonplaces. There are, of course, political commonplaces in the play. Shakespeare was bound to include those opinions and phrases which the man in the street delivers in the midst of every political crisis between the people and the richer classes.<sup>1</sup> But there are a number of wise things also said, such as fall from far-seeing persons, who at a crisis of this kind look backward and look forward. And above all, as I venture to think, we are made to feel, moving like a spirit through the play, the sympathy of Shakespeare with the struggle of the people. It is almost traditionary among the critics to claim Shakespeare as a tolerant mocker of the people, and as a supporter, on the whole, of those, whether of wealth or rank, who stood above them. They make him a kind of Menenius; as if that giant intellect were wholly led away by prejudice, as if he were entirely faithless to his own class and their strife for justice. No one seems to think how impossible, how almost miraculous, considering his many-sided genius, such a position would be for Shakespeare.

It would be wiser to say to ourselves: 'Shakespeare was certain, with that brain of his, to see all sides of the question, and to represent them.' And that is exactly what he does. He had his 'good-humoured laugh' at mobs, their blindness, changeableness, violence, and 'tall talk.' We see the mob of Rome, here and in *Julius Cæsar*,

<sup>1</sup> In another play where, as here, the principal character is dominant—in *Richard III.*—Shakespeare has, for the first time, represented the opinions of the man in the street; not those of demagogues, but of three grave London citizens who, without anything to do with the main actions, discuss the news of the day and the affairs of the state with admirable prudence, and each in character (Act II. Sc. iii.).

following the last orator, blessing in one act those whom they curse in another; heaping honour on their tribunes in one scene, and haling them to the Tarpeian rock in another. We read his picture of the mere demagogue, so like our own, and we know how Shakespeare despised the type. He paints it in the first citizen, who shouts for the death of Coriolanus: 'Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?' 'Let us revenge our wrongs with our pikes, ere we become rakes: for the gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge.' Menenius calls this man, in scorn, 'the great toe of the assembly'—

For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,  
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost,

to win vantage for himself, rather than good for his party. Coriolanus is *the enemy* to him. He sees no good in him at all; what services he has done to his country were done to please his mother and foster his pride, not for the people of Rome. 'He's a very dog to the commonalty.'

But to paint what is foolish and extreme in the people did not prevent Shakespeare from painting what was just in their demands, wise and modest in their conduct; as, when he painted the pride, scorn, and oppressiveness of Coriolanus, he did not involve the whole of the patricianate of Rome in the same vices.

In this play Shakespeare, but not so openly as to offend his patrons, was in sympathy with the people. He records with severe plainness the injustice and misery which they had suffered; and to make this more remarkable he places their cries in the mouth of the shouting demagogue he has so broadly sketched. He knew that the wrongs were real even though their mouthpiece was violent. So far Shakespeare sympathised even with him. These wrongs are fully detailed. Menenius answers, just as these oppressors are customed to say, that the patri-

cians 'care for the people like fathers.' 'Care for us!' answers this citizen—

True, indeed! They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their store-houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

Then, too, his drawing of Coriolanus suggests his sympathy with the popular movement. No one can help seeing that Shakespeare did not love Coriolanus, nor approve his conduct. The last words spoken over him are not like those spoken over Brutus; and both are spoken by enemies. They are chill and half-hearted. His speeches rarely reach nobility of feeling or thought; except when they are concerned with war, or with his mother. They are loaded with big words, so turgid that when we know how Shakespeare could make his great characters speak, we are convinced that he had no admiration, but all but contempt, for Coriolanus. Of course, he pitied his fate, and this pity recurs again and again in the play, but nothing can be more rigid than his steady drawing of the inevitable punishment to which such a character has doomed himself. It is as if Shakespeare were himself Nemesis. In fact, Coriolanus is made to bear the same relation to the body of the patricians that the demagogue of the first act bears to the mass of the people. He is the blustering assertor of the rights and claims of the aristocracy, without foresight, intelligence, temperance, humanity or knowledge, the victim of his violent temper and fatal pride; but withal the greatest of soldiers.

Again, consider Shakespeare's representation of other citizens and the tribunes. He has drawn the reeling mob and the mouthing demagogue. At the same time he draws the temperate and tolerant citizens in the person of

the second citizen. 'Consider,' he says, 'what services Coriolanus has done for his country.' 'Speak not maliciously,' he cries to the demagogue. And he excuses Coriolanus, even for his pride. 'What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous.' All that is like a prudent and kindly hearted Roman; the very opposite of the loud violence of the mob-leader. Moreover, the people are made by Shakespeare to behave exceedingly well at the election of Coriolanus. They repress their rancour in dealing with their great enemy because he has fought so well for Rome. 'If he tell us of his noble deeds, we must also tell him of our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous.' 'I say, if he would incline to the people, there never was a worthier man.' 'He has done nobly, and cannot go without any honest man's voice.' It is impossible to believe that Shakespeare could really despise the people when he makes them speak in this fashion.

And then the tribunes! They are not mere demagogues. They are fighting the battle of their class with prudence, intelligence, and skill, against the stupidity and oppression of the upper class. Not with the unreason of the mob-orator, but with resolute foresight, they determine to overthrow Coriolanus as the common enemy of the people. Once he is exiled they can deal with the rest of the patricians in a quiet way, and with a good hope of success. And they give themselves to that aim with cool precision of attack. They use no wild words. They speak throughout with quietude and resolution, as men who care for the cause of their fellow-citizens more than for themselves.

Politically considered, the play is the artistic record of the victory of a people, unrighteously oppressed, over their oppressor, who is the exaggerated incarnation of the



temper of his class. I will glance through the play from this point of view.

While the citizens are debating their wrongs Menenius comes upon them. He is the old and jovial aristocrat, who loves a cup of hot wine, and adores a hero like Coriolanus; hasty in temper but keeping no malice, and in politics eager for moderate counsels; bluff of speech because he is old, and because of his class-contempt for the people, which contempt he generally modifies into good-humoured attacks on their follies. He is endured, but seen through, by the tribunes of the people—'Come, sir, come, we know you well enough.' A thorough patrician, who yet desires to be hail-fellow-well-met with the people; who has among them the fame of caring for them, but who does not really care for their wrongs in comparison with the smallest right the patricians claim; the prosperous conservative, quite ready to help the people provided the people are kept down. The possibility of any democratic change never enters his mind. The world of Rome will always go on as it is now. You may as well, he says to the citizens,

Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them  
Against the Roman state, whose course will on  
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs  
Of more strong link asunder than can ever  
Appear in your impediment.

The patricians, the senate, are the centre of Rome; if the centre be weakened the people will perish—and he tells his story of the belly and the rebellious members of the body. 'But we are perishing now,' they say, 'and the nobility are the cause.' 'Wait, keep quiet, don't disturb the state, all will be soon quite comfortable. The one thing needful is no change. All your good comes from the patricians'—

No public benefit which you receive  
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,  
And no way from yourselves.

When change has been wrought, and he hears that tribunes have been granted, he does not understand it. 'This is strange,' he says. Then, when further change is wrought, and Coriolanus is banished, Menenius accepts the tribunes and the change; and then, when Rome turns against the tribunes, throws himself back into his old position. His conservatism is permanent opportunism. However, at this early point of the play (in his belief in the everlasting continuance of the state as it is), the blindness of this Roman Polonius is clear, though he seem so wise. Coriolanus sees twice as far, just because his hatred of the people opens his eyes. He knows, when the tribunes are given to the people, that the predominance of his class is doomed. Hatred, often blind, is sometimes keen-eyed.

There are many instances of the blindness of Menenius, of the clear sight of Coriolanus. Here is one. Menenius is the slave of custom; Coriolanus is not. One of the touches of the play nearest to his character is where his pride, and in this case his intelligence, overcomes his conservatism, and he throws precedent overboard—

Custom calls me to't ;

What custom wills, in all things should we do't,  
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,  
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd,  
For truth to o'erpeer.

That is not the conservative position. Menenius cannot agree with him; Coriolanus must follow all the precedents of the past. Again and again he implores him for temperate conduct; and the battle in his mind between love and admiration of Coriolanus and disapproval of his uncontrolled choler is excellently drawn by Shakespeare. Yet, while he disapproves, and is even weary of the furious temper of his friend, he hates the people the more because they attack his friend. From the moment the battle is set in array till the banishment of Coriolanus no one is harder

on the people than Menenius. No Philippe Égalité is to be trusted. The traditions of their class are stronger than their popular good-nature.

The battle has now begun. The one desire of Coriolanus is to overthrow the concession of tribunes to the people: he sees that it

will in time

Win upon power, and throw forth greater themes  
For insurrection's arguing.

The one desire of the tribunes is to overthrow Coriolanus, the unyielding spirit of that aristocratic temper which the people have begun to conquer. If he be not crushed, all they have won is lost. This civil war is aggravated by the proud scorn of Coriolanus for the intelligence, even for the lives of the people. They are of no account in the world save as servants. Whether they live or die, suffer or rejoice, is no matter. If they complain, let me slaughter them;

Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,  
And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry  
With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high  
As I could pick my lance.

Hang 'em! Bid them wash their faces, and keep their teeth clean. Then he mocks at their sufferings—

They said they were an-hungry; sigh'd forth proverbs;  
That hunger broke stone walls; that dogs must eat;  
That meat was made for mouths; that the gods sent not  
Corn for the rich men only. With these shreds  
They vented their complainings; . . .

Go; get you home, you fragments!

'If they want food,' said Foulon, in the French Revolution, 'let them eat grass.'

The Volscian War then complicates the situation. Coriolanus hails it with joy. It will enable the nobles to expend the 'musty superfluity' of the people; and the huge success of Coriolanus in it makes the patricians

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hope that they will now get the upper hand, and by installing Coriolanus as consul, either balance the power of the tribunes, or finally win their cause.

It seems to promise well. Coriolanus comes home, and is at the top of Rome—people, children, women throng to welcome him. But this only serves to make more prominent that division of classes which is the curse of states. Menenius, who was kindly to the people once, is now bitter against them. His scorn of the tribunes is almost as great as that of Coriolanus—‘God-den to your worships; more of your conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebeians.’ If he thought thus, the rest of the patricians, less tolerant than he, would think the same more strongly. Nor is the real division of the people from the patrician class, in spite of the apparent unity of Rome under the excitement of military glory, less clear. The tribunes are not carried away by the triumph of Coriolanus. They see in it a fresh danger to that liberty of the people for which they are contending: they lay a plot for his destruction as the enemy of the people, and it is just that they should do it. Coriolanus deserved death.

The talk of Sicinius and Brutus, admirably conceived by Shakespeare, proves them masters of the situation. It is marked by that steadfast pitilessness towards the oppressing class which has characterised, in all revolutions of the people, the leaders of the people; and at the back of which is the long hatred of years, sometimes of centuries, as it was in the French Revolution. The enemy must be annihilated. And the way to destroy Coriolanus is clear—to work on his choleric pride till he insults the people. He is elected consul, but the tribunes call him before the tribunal of the people to answer for his ill-deeds against them. He faces them with a suppressed fury of wrath, which, lashed by the tribunes’ accusa-

tions, breaks forth into a torrent of mad and scornful anger. They sting him to the quick, playing on his wrathfulness as on an instrument. In the whole of these wonderful scenes in the second and third acts, the tribunes are the only cool-headed, dignified folk. Every one else is infected with the rage of Coriolanus. When, at last, Sicinius cries, 'He hath spoken like a traitor, and shall answer for it as traitors do,' Coriolanus bursts out into a full fury—

COR. Thou wretch ! despite o'erwhelm thee !  
 What should the people do with these bald tribunes ?  
 On whom depending, their obedience fails  
 To the greater bench. In a rebellion,  
 When what's not meet, but what must be, was law,  
 Then were they chosen : in a better hour,  
 Let what is meet be said it must be meet,  
 And throw their power i' the dust.

BRU. Manifest treason !

SIC. This a consul ? no.

BRU. The ædiles, ho ! Let him be apprehended.

And instantly, Rome is up. The two parties fight in a riot. The tribunes are masters, and condemn Coriolanus to death. Menenius intervenes, and Coriolanus stands his trial, but his rage, though he tries for temperance, breaks out more wildly than ever. His courage, his pride, his selfishness, his insolence, his furious temper, are worked up to their extremes ; and he never ceases to indulge them till he has settled his own ruin. The oppressor of the people is self-oppressed. Violence and weakness, the sister of violence, are his tyrants. Pride is their root, but it is not the pride of a great or a strong man, in whom pride is the master of the passions. The pride of Coriolanus is but the servant or the slavish comrade of his choler. A single word like 'traitor' drives him beyond all bounds, and the reticence of a stately pride is lost.

The fires i' the lowest hell fold in the people !  
 Call me their traitor ! Thou injurious tribune !  
 Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,  
 In thy hands clutch'd as many millions, in  
 Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say  
 'Thou liest' unto thee with a voice as free  
 As I do pray the gods.

This settles his fate ; but as a galling favour, he is let off death, and banished on pain of death. His last speech, as he turns on them, has that nobility of tone which adds itself to a vice when the doom of the vice is pronounced. The majesty of the irreparable belongs to it.

COR. You common cry of curs ! whose breath I hate  
 As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize  
 As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
 That do corrupt my air, I banish you ;  
 And here remain with your uncertainty !  
 Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts !  
 Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,  
 Fan you into despair ! Have the power still  
 To banish your defenders ; till at length  
 Your ignorance,—which finds not, till it feels,—  
 Making not reservation of yourselves,—  
 Still your own foes,—deliver you as most  
 Abated captives to some nation  
 That won you without blows ! Despising,  
 For you, the city, thus I turn my back :  
 There is a world elsewhere.

The people do not care a straw for his scorn. They are lost in joy at getting rid of him—

ÆD. The people's enemy is gone, is gone !  
 CITIZENS. Our enemy is banish'd !—He is gone !—Hoo ! hoo !  
 [*They all shout and throw up their caps.*]

So ends the contest between Coriolanus and the tribunes. They and the people are the victors. And we may fairly conclude that Shakespeare did not despise the cause of the people or its leaders, when we find that the leaders are represented throughout as men who have kept their heads ; cool, temperate, prudent, but resolute to attain their end ; and using steadily and ruthlessly the

best means for this end. Having won, they are quite sober and quiet. They indulge in no boasting, but go about their business, congratulating themselves on the quiet of Rome. Their just mastership of the stormy elements of the people keeps down the anger of the partisans of Coriolanus. Every day of quiet makes Coriolanus less missed by his friends, who 'blush that without him the world goes well.' Menenius has grown kind again to the tribunes, and talks to them as if they were nobles. He even criticises Coriolanus. Shakespeare has taken pains to lift the struggle of the people into our approval.

*Enter SICINIUS and BRUTUS.*

SIC. We hear not of him, neither need we fear him ;  
 His remedies are tame i' the present peace  
 And quietness o' the people, which before  
 Were in wild hurry. Here do we make his friends  
 Blush that the world goes well, who rather had,  
 Though they themselves did suffer by 't, behold  
 Dissentious numbers pestering streets, than see  
 Our tradesmen singing in their shops and going  
 About their functions friendly.

*Enter MENENIUS.*

BRU. We stood to't in good time. Is this Menenius ?

SIC. 'Tis he, 'tis he. O ! he is grown most kind  
 Of late. Hail, sir !

MEN. Hail to you both !

SIC. Your Coriolanus is not much miss'd,  
 But with his friends : the commonwealth doth stand,  
 And so would do, were he more angry at it.

MEN. All's well ; and might have been much better, if  
 He could have temporiz'd.

SIC. This is a happier and more comely time  
 Than when these fellows ran about the streets  
 Crying confusion.

Nor does this sympathetic representation end here. When Coriolanus joins the Volscians, and threatens Rome with ruin, the whole city is in wild terror and disturbance ; Cominius, Menenius, and the rest of the nobility lose

their heads. All they can do is to abuse the tribunes. Sicinius and Brutus alone are self-controlled and quiet. All they say then and afterwards is full of care for Rome, for the people, for the patricians who only care for their own safety. They speak like steadfast Romans to the terrified citizens ;

Go, masters, get you home : be not dismay'd :  
 These are a side that would be glad to have  
 This true which they so seem to fear. Go home,  
 And show no sign of fear.

And the people disperse at once. Afterwards, the tribunes are the accepted advisers of Rome. It is they who persuade Menenius to ask peace from Coriolanus; and he obeys. They speak like men who know they have done right, and who are willing to accept the consequences. Even when all seems lost, they do not lose their dignity. It is the same when the mob attempts their life. Thus, amid the tossing turmoil of Rome, Shakespeare has made the leaders of the people's cause the only hope and trust, and the quiet powers, of the city. He does not point this out. He says nothing. But what he has written stands, and it stands for the people's cause in this play against that idea of government which Menenius held, and Coriolanus exaggerated into its extremes.

(2) Important and dramatic as this political aspect of the play is, it does not take us on to the high levels of poetry. From the poetic point of view the fate of Rome is inferior in interest to the development and representation of the character and fate of Coriolanus. Everything else is brought to bear on this. Cominius, Menenius, and the rest illustrate him. Aufidius, the soldier, is set over against him. His mother, his wife and Valeria bring out new elements in his character; the tribunes whip into activity his evil and foolish qualities. The whole people of Rome are in arms against him. He rises alone before



us, like a towering rock from a wide and tossing sea. At the beginning of the fourth act all eyes are fixed on the banished man, as he goes out alone into the friendless world—

Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen  
Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen,—

The fourth and fifth acts tell the results of his action, and his fall. The play is almost the play of one man.

What ruins Coriolanus? Pride in himself and for himself alone, and the furious choler which, never controlled, breaks out when his pride is injured.<sup>1</sup> He has never from a boy curbed his violent nature, and his mother has encouraged it. He is its victim now.

The force of circumstance ruins the Brutus of *Julius Cæsar*. It partly spoils the life of Coriolanus. Had he bent his nature only a little to circumstance, he might have lived honoured in Rome; and been bettered by the bending. Brutus could not have bettered but worsened himself by bending to his circumstances. They were such that to bend to them would have been to lose his moral character. Brutus is overthrown by the rightness of his nature, Coriolanus by the wrongness of his. Rome, and not self, is first with Brutus. Self, and not Rome, is first with Coriolanus. The cause of freedom is first with Brutus, and he dies for it. The cause of his own pride is first with Coriolanus, and he dies for himself. His pride and fury slay him; and he deserves his fate. When a government reaches the same state, it

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, who often thinks of heredity, makes the son of Coriolanus repeat the nature of his father in a boyish fashion,—and a hateful!

VAL. O' my word, the father's son; I'll swear 'tis a very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' Wednesday half an hour together: has such a confirmed countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butterfly; and when he caught it, he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes and up again; caught it again; or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it; O, I warrant, how he mammocked it.

VOL. One on's father's moods.

VAL. Indeed, la, 'tis a noble child.

slays itself; but a government dies slowly, an individual quickly.

On the other hand, Coriolanus is brave, eager for fame, noble in act and thought when in war, war the very breath of his nostrils. He claims to be modest, and is not truly so. He loves his mother dearly and his wife; he is a good friend, but he does not love—until the end—any of them well enough to sacrifice, for their sake, either the vengeance he desires for the galling of his pride, or his resolve to fulfil the demands his fiery nature makes upon him. This—‘to be true to his nature’—is his only conscience; and when the nature is selfish, it is the hardest selfishness in the world.

In relation to the people, he is the type of the haughty, irresponsible feudal noble, whose only law was his own will; the plague of humanity. The people to Coriolanus are a rabble, curs, cowards, not to be trusted, changing every moment; peace makes them proud, war terrifies them. They are not men but beasts, and to be ruled like beasts. In relation to his own class, he is honourable, courteous, even kindly when his nature is not too much interfered with. His mother has trained him to give a loose rein to his impulses; and he cannot understand why she desires him to speak well to the vile people. ‘Would you have me,’ he cries, ‘false to my nature?’

Pride of this kind is sometimes silent and dignified, when there is some other quality in the nature as strong as itself and more noble; but when it devours into itself all the other qualities, it becomes almost a frenzy, and is entirely devoid of pity. It issues then in a raging madness of unbridled temper. This is the case with Coriolanus, and it is splendidly wrought out by Shakespeare. On this swiftly raised cholera the tribunes build his ruin. He is, on account of it, a child in their

hands. When they have lashed him into fury, he loses the game—

BRU. Put him to choler straight. He hath been us'd  
 Ever to conquer, and to have his worth  
 Of contradiction : being once chaf'd, he cannot  
 Be rein'd again to temperance : then he speaks  
 What's in his heart ; and that is there which looks  
 With us to break his neck.

Yet, in his farewell to his own people, he is as gentle, courteous, brave and steady as he is the opposite to the citizens. To his own caste he is the 'perfect gentleman,' to his mother the revering and loving son. That he should be so fine a character among his own class makes his conduct to those not of his class all the worse. Shakespeare understood the ruthless pride of the feudal noblesse to its last grain. And it is like his infinite variety to introduce between the furious scenes of Coriolanus's battle with the people, and the drear misfortunes of his lonely fall into treason to his country, the sweet and tender scene with which the fourth act begins. He bids farewell to his mother, wife, to Menenius, Cominius, and the young nobility of Rome outside the gate of the city ; and he speaks nobly to his mother—

COR. Come leave your tears : a brief farewell : the beast  
 With many heads butts me away. Nay, mother,  
 Where is your ancient courage ? you were us'd  
 To say extremity was the trier of spirits ;  
 That common chances common men could bear ;  
 That when the sea was calm all boats alike  
 Show'd mastership in floating ; fortune's blows,  
 When most struck home, being gentle, wounded, craves  
 A noble cunning : you were us'd to load me  
 With precepts that would make invincible  
 The heart that conn'd them.

Nor is his farewell to his friends less gentle, less noble. Yet in the midst of it, Shakespeare makes us feel that his rage is only for the moment at rest. His wife interrupts him. He cannot bear it. He turns on her angrily

—‘Nay, I prithee, woman.’ His mother is afraid of his imprudence, of his going away alone. And when Coriolanus hears the doubt, even though it is his mother who expresses it, his temper almost breaks out—‘O ye gods!’ he cries. The waves are still running high in his soul; his solitude will be dark with wrath and vengeance. That is within his heart which will not cease to gnaw; the snake of a galled pride, the selfish biting of revenge.

Formerly, he fought for fame rather than for his country, but the two happened to be coincident. Therefore, love of his country was attributed to him. Now that he is divided from his country, angered pride is stronger than what seemed love of his country, and he betrays his country. The treason the tribunes accused him of is now really his. He is half conscious of this, and he imputes the change—to what? Not to himself at all, but to the work of circumstance. This is a common mental trick of those who have spoilt their life by self-indulgence.

O world! thy slippery turns. Friends now fast sworn,  
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,  
Whose house, whose bed, whose meal, and exercise,  
Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love  
Unseparable, shall within this hour,  
On a dissension of a doit, break out  
To bitterest enmity: so, fellest foes,  
Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep  
To take the one the other, by some chance,  
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends  
And interjoin their issues. So with me:  
My birth-place hate I, and my love's upon  
This enemy town.

This is the pure nonsense of self-excusing pride. Friendships and enmities are not broken or united in that fashion. When in that fashion love is broken, it proves that, on one side at least, there has been no real

love at all; only that self has been at the bottom of the apparent love. Coriolanus never loved any one half as much as he loved himself. Even his love of his mother was founded on her encouragement of the self within him.

In the whole of the striking scene with Aufidius, when he declares his treason and his greed for vengeance, Coriolanus is savagely true to what he calls his nature. He declares boldly that it is spite and anger that bring him to his enemies' camp; he desires no mercy; he will not abate a jot of himself to save his life. If Aufidius will help him to avenge himself—well; if not, why he will die. His treason is complete. He does the only thing in the world which would turn his friends in Rome against him.

Deeper and deeper, then, is the loneliness in which he moves. The Volscians, however glad they are to have him, know him as a traitor to his country, one who has done that which no common soldier in Corioli would do. Menenius, Cominius, look on him with fear and pain. His mother, wife, and child feel him to be their enemy. He has proved that the tribunes and people were right. To this, at last, to this supreme solitude, self, unrestrained, leads a man. To this treason to himself, his country, and his friends, a furious temper, backed by pride, conducts its victim. Coriolanus accuses his ill-luck; but he is his own destroyer. That which overwhelms him is not destiny, but his own creation. Nothing follows which is not the inevitable result of the hideous position in which he has placed himself. And Shakespeare has wrought out magnificently this inevitableness of ruin. Aufidius is the instrument of the fate of Coriolanus. He shows the bottom of his heart in his answer to his former enemy—

O Marcius, Marcius!

Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart  
A root of ancient envy.

But it is only rooted out because he sees his ancient foe in the gloom of misfortune. Envy is too subtle a devil to leave the heart so soon: and Shakespeare knows its fashions. Moreover with envy ever goes hate. It is envy's boon companion. And Aufidius's hate was deep.

Where I find him, were it  
At home, upon my brother's guard, even there  
Against the hospitable canon, would I  
Wash my fierce hand in 's heart.

Such a hatred does not die; it only sleeps for a time. We have a comfortable way of thinking that our vices have gone when the reason of them is momentarily taken away. It was agreeable to Aufidius at first to be magnanimous to his rival, to be able to say, 'Poor Coriolanus,' and to give him half his power. That flattered his patronising pride. But the moment Coriolanus again took precedence, envy came back with seven more devils than before; and in this resurrection of envy and its results lies the rest of the drama. The envy of Aufidius is deepened by the pride of Coriolanus, who will even in exile have the first place; and he uses this insolent pride, as the tribunes used it before, to work the ruin of Coriolanus, who had learned nothing from all his pain and follies, who was still himself his only law, his only right.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's work that he introduces here, after Aufidius and Coriolanus meet, a humorous episode in the talk of the servants. The two leaders deceive themselves into an apparent friendship, each ignorant of what their passions of pride and envy are sure to produce. But the servants see much further than their masters. They see the folly of both these great men and laugh at it, especially at that of their master. Their talk is an excellent piece of wit, of human nature; and also of their class, when they are mere hire-

lings. They have not a vestige of care for their country, only for their own interests. 'Let me have war, say I; it exceeds peace as day does night; it's sprightly, waking, audible, full of vent. . . . The wars for my money. I hope to see Romans as cheap as Volscians.' And it may be that Shakespeare meant a satire on the class feeling of the nobility of Rome by noting something of the same kind in a different and a lower class.

Then we find Coriolanus worshipped as a leader, not as a man, by the Volscian soldiery: apparently on the peak of fortune. But he is really more lost, more alone than ever. No one loves him. He can have no communion with his comrades. It is almost pitiable to hear his appeals to Aufdius, who hates him, to tell him what to do. Then in his solitude, his affections, the best part of him, which his pride had smothered, awake again. Though he repulses Menenius, who comes to implore grace for Rome, we feel that he loves him. He longs to see his mother, his wife and son, but his position is such that he dare not satisfy his longing. It is a piteous case, for if we add to his vast loneliness this intense and silent emotion of natural affection, whose indulgence is forbidden, he becomes (as Shakespeare's sympathy with sorrow meant him to become) an object of noble pity to the audience—and perhaps to the gods.

At last the desire of his heart is given him as he sits alone in his great chair, encompassed by the envious Volscians. His mother, wife and son, their friend Valeria, approach him to beg for peace. The home-loving man in him, the only soft part in his nature, long repressed, long unoccupied, sees in them his home, remembers all the past, and breaks forth like a torrent, which in vain he tries to dam;

My wife comes foremost; then the honoured mould  
Wherein this trunk was fram'd; and in her hand

The grandchild to her blood. But out, affection !  
 All bond and privilege of nature, break !  
 Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.  
 What is that curtsy worth ? or those doves' eyes,  
 Which can make gods forsworn ? I melt and am not  
 Of stronger earth than others.

This is Coriolanus at his best, thrilled by those natural affections which last longest, and which in their natural working are the best medicine for the selfish heart. Coriolanus fights against them ; his promise to Aufidius, his vow of revenge beat back his yielding and forgiveness. But when his mother finally turns from mere arguing the question to her ancient way with him, and claims his reverence for her motherhood ; and then, when he is still silent, breaks into scorn of him, and bids him, repudiating him, seek his family among the Volscians—

Come, let us go :  
 This fellow had a Volscian to his mother ;  
 His wife is in Corioli, and his child  
 Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch :  
 I am hush'd until our city be a-fire,  
 And then I'll speak a little.

why, then, Coriolanus can bear no more. His lonely pride is shattered by the dominance of what is tender, good, and natural in him. For the first time in his life he is truly unselfish. He gives up his most passionate desire, revenge. He puts away pride and anger, the tyrannic qualities of his nature ; and he does this knowing, at least suspecting, that this means his death—and it does mean it.

The man is redeemed. The repentance is not too late for honour, not too late for moral greatness ; for thus conquered, he is at last great, having won, by renouncing all that he once thought were the sources of his fame, immortal fame. But he is not freed from the results of his long wrong-doing. Repentance is too late to save his life ; and that he knows he is doomed makes



his act the nobler. Thus Shakespeare veils the perishing man with tenderness, pity, and admiration. We forgive what we hated in him in the past. His wife and mother, knowing he is lost, yet went home with peace in their heart, and Rome remembered only his fame as a warrior. Over his dead body the patricians and the tribunes came to respect each other more. The dead Coriolanus was greater than the living.

Nothing is more impressive than the contrast, at the end of the play, of the triumph and joy of Rome at her deliverance, of the mother and wife of Coriolanus lauded to the skies while death and the passion of death must have been in their hearts, with the wild scene of the conspirators and Aufidius closing, in envy and revenge, round the dying Coriolanus at Antium. He dies like a lion ringed by the hunters; alone to the close, brave, angry, all himself to the very last breath. Aufidius, playing on his choler, calls him 'traitor'—the word has followed him—then 'boy.' And Coriolanus, smitten into his own furious anger, speaks with such contempt of the Volscians that he drives them to his slaughter. One of the lords, looking on him dead, speaks what might serve as his epitaph

His own impatience

Takes from Aufidius a great part of blame.

Let's make the best of it.

Yet, Aufidius is not ignoble. He can see more clearly than either patrician or plebeian what is of a fine nature in Coriolanus. He has not been as much subjected as they to the worry of his pride and rage. Even when he most envies Coriolanus, he can make a judgment of his character and career—as he does to the lieutenant at the end of Act IV.—which is at once tolerant and wise, and which, in itself, is a most noble piece of poetry. It is

given almost against his will, for he is as determined as the tribunes were to put an end to Coriolanus.

When, Caius, Rome is thine,  
Thou art poor'st of all ; then shortly thou art mine

He has now done this work ; he has sated his hatred and envy, and thinks it politic to seem sorry for his fate. It is not true sorrow ; envy has no grief ; it is only to seem noble that he says,

My rage is gone,  
And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up :  
Help, three o' the chiefest soldiers ; I'll be one.  
Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully ;  
Trail your steel pikes. Though in this city he  
Hath widow'd and unchilded many a one,  
Which to this hour bewail the injury,  
Yet he shall have a noble memory.  
Assist.

Meanwhile the feast is high in Rome.

Finally, there are the women, and the relation between Coriolanus and his mother. The tragedy is set in the early days of the Republic, before the days when luxury had eaten up simplicity. The life, even of the great nobles, was austere and quiet, the women lovers of their home and keepers at home. Shakespeare, who always loved simplicity of life, was pleased to draw with a still and gracious hand the household of Volumnia and Virgilia, and the visit to it of their friend Valeria. Its charm and dignity are not in any splendour, but in the characters of its women. Virgilia is as quiet as a forest lake. She will not leave the house while Coriolanus is away. The streets and shows of Rome shall not see her till he returns, and she is firm as a rock in this. A steadfast resolvedness attends on her quietness. Silence is her chief speech. All through the play she scarcely speaks. Yet she is alive before us. Only the greatest artist could, with a few touches here and there, placed exactly where they should be, and in fitness to their

place, paint a whole character with such force and livingness that she remains for ever clear, for ever interesting. Shakespeare had done this for Cordelia; he does it again for Virgilia. When Volumnia praises the battle-rage of Coriolanus, and extols his blood and wounds, Virgilia cries—

His bloody brow! Oh, Jupiter, no blood!

Heavens bless my lord from fell Aufidius!

And we know her heart from that moment. When Coriolanus meets her on his triumphant return from Corioli, he meets her with this word—

My gracious silence, hail!  
 Wouldst thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home,  
 That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah! my dear,  
 Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear,  
 And mothers that lack sons.

And we seem to see in the tender words, and in the admiration of 'My gracious silence,' the secret married life and love of Virgilia and her stormy husband. All through the long talk of Volumnia with the senators and Coriolanus about the consulship, Virgilia does not say one word. The only time she breaks out into speech is against the tribunes after the banishment of her husband, and her strong words then are sufficiently motivated by the occasion. Twice only does she speak in that great scene when with his mother she comes to plead for Rome, and the secret depths and even fierceness of her Roman nature are shown in the force and tenderness with which she urges her right as wife and mother on her husband. 'Thou shalt tread,' says Volumnia, 'if thou march to Rome, upon thy mother's womb,'

That brought thee to this world.

VIR.

Ay, and mine,

That brought you forth this boy, to keep your name  
 Living to time.

Only long silence can concentrate so much into a few words!<sup>1</sup> And we hear of her no more.

Valeria is a lively sketch of a great lady. The patrician note is in all her speech when she comes to visit Virgilia. She finds her sewing, and bids her come out into the movement of Rome. What are household cares to life? Why think of a husband when there is so much to do and see?—'all the yarn Penelope spun in Ulysses' absence did but fill Ithaca full of moths.' She praises Virgilia's boy—'O' my word, the father's son: I'll swear 'tis a very pretty boy—he has such a confirmed countenance,' and she tells with no pity how he mammoaked a butterfly. 'Come, go with me; turn your solemnness out of doors, Virgilia.'

She is a noble, idle, pleasant, honourable, free-spoken lady. Yet, when misfortune is near, she is as dignified as she is silent. She says not one word when she meets, with Volumnia, Coriolanus; no, not even when she hears that splendid praise of her which has made her immortal.

The noble sister of Publicola,  
The moon of Rome; chaste as the icicle  
That's curdied by the frost from purest snow,  
And hangs on Dian's temple: dear Valeria!

Volumnia is more fully drawn. She is the Roman patrician and the Roman mother. The reverence of Coriolanus for her is a record of the ancient Roman honour for the ties of home, especially for motherhood. She is not only a mother; she is as much a patrician as her son, but without his furious temper; on the contrary, with a good share of politic prudence. She has the faults of her class and her position, otherwise she is a noble woman. These faults are, however, too much for her womanly tenderness—and for her honour. Her honour slips away when she advises Coriolanus to

<sup>1</sup> Volumnia's words are Plutarch's, Virgilia's Shakespeare's.

deceive the people in order to get the consulship. He is true, and he resents giving the lie to his nature. She excuses the fraud by the practice of war. It is lawful to deceive an enemy, and to her the people are the foe. As to her tenderness, she has it for her son and friends, but it is tenderness modified by the hunger for fame, for glory in war. The thoughtless militarism which has in all ages infected her class has made her its victim. She loves to see her son's wounds which tell of his might and bravery. She has no care for the wounds of his men, for the wretched people who are victimised to make the fame of her son. She boasts in a terrible phrase of the terror and woe he causes. The trumpets sound as he returns. 'These,' she cries, 'are the ushers of Marcius: before him he carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears.'

When we come to the close relationship between her son and her, we come to a serious study. They stand together in an inner circle, isolated, as it were, from the rest. When the political interest, even when the fate of Coriolanus in the play, are dimmed in memory, the mother and the son still dwell in our thoughts. Their relationship is the inmost heart of the drama, where the deepest affections play. The love that is between them glorifies them, and creates round the haughty woman and the terrible warrior the gracious atmosphere of home. We retire, from time to time, from the noise of Rome and Volscian wars, into an island of domestic peace and steady affection of which Volumnia and Coriolanus are the source. Virgilia sits and sews, Volumnia talks to her of her husband and her own son; the boy plays in the garden; Valeria drops in to gossip; and here Coriolanus—his violence and pride lost in his reverence and love of his mother who admires and loves him, and herself in him—finds his better self. Not till he is divided from

his mother is he lost. The mother lives in the son. She has made him from his birth; both of them dwell on that long education. The son is the mother in a man. His fighting is what she would have done had she been a man. Had she been the wife of Hercules, she would have taken half his labours on herself. Her pride in her class is his. And his scorn of the people is hers. She taught him

To call them woollen vassals, things created  
 To buy and sell with goats, to show bare heads  
 In congregations, to yawn, be still, and wonder,  
 When one but of my ordinance stood up  
 To speak of peace or war.

Her love of fame has been his inspiration. Every charge he has made on the enemies of Rome, every wound he has received, have been made and received with the voice of his mother in his ears; and she has, in thought and admiration, made the charges and received the wounds. 'O! he is wounded; I thank the gods for't,' she cries, when he comes home from Corioli. For his glory she has lived. One honour yet remains—he must be consul.

I have liv'd  
 To see inherited my very wishes,  
 And the buildings of my fancy: only  
 There's one thing wanting which I doubt not but  
 Our Rome will cast upon thee.

They stand apart and together. The honour we give to the son we give also to the mother who is its source. The pity we finally give to the son in his ruin, we give in fuller stream to the mother.

Yet there is a difference—a difference belonging to sex. The pride of the man has no policy, the violence of his temper has no self-control. She has both. In that scene, where his friends press Coriolanus to coax the people for the sake of the consulship, his pride

refuses their request. Volumnia loves his pride; it is her own creation. But it were well it should be modified by policy. And she argues, till in her impetuous arguing she contradicts herself, and declares that his pride is not of her own making; 'Owe thy pride thyself.' Here is her advice;

You might have been enough the man you are  
With striving less to be so : . . .

Pray be counsell'd ;

I have a heart of mettle apt as yours,  
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger  
To better vantage. . . .

Prithee now,

Go and be ruled : although I know thou hadst rather  
Follow thine enemy in a fiery gulf  
Than flatter him in a bower.

And when he refuses to bend his truth to flatter the mob, Volumnia, employing the argument of her motherhood, displays, in what she says, her own character and her son's; and where they divide from one another—

At thy choice then :

To beg of thee it is my more dishonour  
Than thou of them. Come all to ruin : let  
Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear  
Thy dangerous stoutness, for I mock at death  
With as big a heart as thou. Do as thou list.  
Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,  
But owe thy pride thyself.

Yet his fury is his mother's fault, who was even pleased when as a boy he let loose his rages, for she thought of what they would make him do in battle. But now, when his consulship depends on his keeping his temper, she advises him in vain. She herself has learned self-restraint; to gain her end she has a woman's hypocrisy. But yet, when the cruel hours come, she is like her son, borne beyond all self-restraint, all fortitude, into raging words. 'The hoarded plague of the gods requite your love,' she cries to the tribunes who have banished Coriolanus.

I'll tell thee what : yet go :  
 Nay, but thou shalt stay too : I would my son  
 Were in Arabia, and thy tribe before him,  
 His good sword in his hand.

And when the tribunes have left, the storm still rages  
 in her heart ;

I would the gods had nothing else to do  
 But to confirm my curses !

Anger's my meat ; I sup upon myself.

And when the parting comes, her anger and her love  
 break out together ;

Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome,  
 And occupations perish !

We see the fierce temper which, unmodified by her womanly self-control, she has handed on to her son. It ruins him, and the bitter consciousness of that must have been her dreadful punishment, when it made him a traitor to his country.

When that terrible day came, and she saw her son arrayed against Rome, that which was greatest in her character—the solid courage, the invincible fortitude of the woman—opened out to undo the evil she had made in her son. She uses her motherhood to conquer him. That which is deeper in her even than motherhood appears. Her country is more to her than her son or her son's wrongs. His wrong against Rome is greater than all the wrongs done to him by Rome; and she speaks against him for Rome. Most of her speeches are taken directly from Plutarch, but the exquisite tenderness in the scene is Shakespeare's. It is Shakespeare who makes Coriolanus turn to his wife and cry with an exile's passion—

O ! a kiss  
 Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge !

Then the rest is between the mother and the son, between



these two who, in the isolation of their long love, are always alone. He kneels to her in the depth of duty. When she kneels to him, she thinks it wrong, but it is for Rome. He knows it is wrong; it strikes him into a passion of denial.

What is this ?

Your knees to me ! to your corrected son !  
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach  
Fillip the stars ; then let the mutinous winds  
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun,  
Murd'ring impossibility, to make  
What cannot be, slight work.

He is wrought into wild hyperbole—Shakespeare's way, and the way of his time, when passion was represented as supreme. Then Volumnia shows him Valeria, his son, his wife, and the form of these appeals is out of Shakespeare's heart. The rest, till Coriolanus yields, is from Plutarch, but Shakespeare, by heightening the phrases into passion and by his melody, lifts the prose of Plutarch into poetry. Moreover, and on this he dwells more than Plutarch, he makes it quite clear that Volumnia abjures her motherhood if her son will not save his country. The golden tie will then be broken. All that was dear to her in him—his honour, his good fame, his filial piety—are then lost, and his life accursed for ever. They are no longer one, but two, if he do not yield to her. So far Plutarch is his source, but at the close, when she turns to scorn, and with a bitter scoff flings her motherhood away, the terrible phrase is Shakespeare's own

Come, let us go :

This fellow had a Volscian to his mother.

Then Coriolanus, that being shattered which was his very life, breaks down into a passion of repentance ;

O mother, mother !

What have you done ?

And these two, whose love is at the heart of the play,

are again at one. They part in peace. But that has been which is irreparable. A mighty rending asunder has divided this island of love for ever. The sea rolls deep between Rome and Corioli. Mother and son look at one another with love, but it is across a gulf of intolerable regret. Yet, the division is not for long; it cannot long be borne. Coriolanus goes to his death, his mother to her sorrow and her failure. And it is better, perhaps, for him in his swift death than for Volumnia in her life amid the rejoicing of Rome. When the news came that he had died in a brawl and by Aufidius, how could she live with all the past in her heart?

## IX

### WINTER'S TALE

THE story is taken from Greene's *Pandosto*, and to be the origin of so dulcet a play is enough for the praise of Greene. All we need here to know is that it is one of the dramas Shakespeare wrote in his latest period, after the great tragedies and the Roman plays. Its temper then is the temper of the last years of his life, and that temper is full of the experience of a man, and yet of the spirit of youth. *Winter's Tale* is so varied in events and characters, and the characters play in and out of one another with such a charm of contrast, that the surprises of intellect and emotion are as numerous as they are pleasant. And these surprises are yet so mellowed by the temperance and beauty of the poetic tongue in which they are given, and so carefully motivated, that they do not startle us more than noble art permits. Of course, the interval of sixteen years in the middle is awkward. The impression, it is said, of two plays instead of one is made on us; the unity of the action is too rudely broken. But there is, at the end, the impression of a spiritual unity when the ruin wrought by Leontes' jealousy of Polixenes is repaired by the love of the son of Polixenes and the daughter of Leontes, and in the new atmosphere of their love Hermione re-embraces Leontes, and this is the true action of the piece. The sixteen years are then like a dream-interval, and seem naturally to belong to a tale told on a Winter's Night; *Χειμερινὸς ὄνειρος, ὅτε μήκιστα αἱ νύκτες.*

The building of such a tale necessitates a great variety. We pass suddenly from the life of courts to that of a pastoral village, and from the village back to the court; and throughout the changes the mastery of the dramatist over the extremes of human life is easy and complete. We pass from the destroying jealousy of Leontes to the tender idyll of Perdita and Florizel; from the blunt scolding of Paulina to the grave dignity of Hermione; from the top of joy in Perdita's heart to the abyss in which her love seems shattered; from the maiden whiteness of Perdita and the honesty of the shepherd to the rejoicing roguery and gross jests of Autolycus—and we pass through all these changes without any shock, the fitness of speech to each character is so finished, the truth to nature so convincing.

It is a *Winter's Tale*, to be told in the firelight; with enough fantasy in it to charm the children, and enough passion to make the elders pensive. The pastoral episode of the disguised Prince and the shepherdess-Princess who prefer love to thrones, the resurrection of the statue into Hermione, the child exposed in the desert-country, the bear who devours the servant of the jealous king, the discovery of Perdita's birth, are all linked to common folk-tale, have its sentiment and breathe its air. The land also is the land of romance, where geographical and historical realities are subjected both by Greene and Shakespeare to the play of the imagination. We sail into Bohemia from Sicily. Even Apollo has become romantic. As usual, the classic revival plays in and out of the romance of Shakespeare. Delphi is still sought to solve a doubtful question. The temple is still served by the priests, the rites and groves still inspire awe; and all the time 'that rare Italian master, Julio Romano,' is painting in Rome. That other element of the Elizabethan Pastoral is also here. Florizel and Perdita find their best

parallels in the shepherds and maidens of Sidney and Spenser, in the *Arcadia* and the *Faerie Queen*. There is no need to trace them further back. Lastly, we slide in the very middle of the play over sixteen years, and claim the right of the sovereign imagination to do so, since it is in his power, as in that of Time,

To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour  
To plant and o'erwhelm custom.

The introductory scene is wrought with Shakespeare's usual art of preparation and explanation. Camillo and his friend dwell on the old friendship of Leontes and Polixenes till it fills the thought of the audience. They relate, and the point is important, that the two kings have not met for many years.

It was skilful of Shakespeare to insist on this friendship. For on its sudden breaking the knot of the drama which has to be untied is made. And the breaking up of it is half suggested by the reiterated insistence of Camillo and Archidamus on its constancy. Their confidence appears to fly in the face of the known mutability of the course of the world. The heavens seem so sunny that we pre-  
sage that the gods will be jealous. It is against experience to believe that friendship, when it has been the friendship of boys, and when long absence has intervened, can continue to be in age what it was in youth. Interchanged letters do not record the change of character which the long years have made. We think we have been living together. The fact is, we have steadily deviated from one another. Moreover, it is quite possible that each has, in absence, idealised the other, and when they meet, the shock is indeed a disillusion. Neither is the man the other knew. A gulf opens then between them. Efforts are made to bridge the gulf. They only deepen it. Affections of this kind, being forced, fly

further apart. At last, wearied by this unnatural state of things, and by its half-falsehood, we know that we have deceived ourselves, and are angry with ourselves and with our friend. Some slight circumstance intervenes, like Hermione beseeching Polixenes; and the long-repressed irritation, catching on to some latent evil passion in our nature, like jealousy, explodes in a moment into hatred, repulsion, or at least indifference. The soil in the heart of Leontes had been charged, now and for some time past, with anger, suspicion, with a kind of hypocrisy, with false-ness, and with all the evil elements which come into us when we are dreadfully bored with some one we once loved, and conceal our boredom. Polixenes had been staying nine months and more with Leontes. No wise man would expose his friend to so severe a trial. Polixenes must have been something of a good-natured fool; and his conversation confirms that judgment.

Again, as part of this preparatory work, observe the art by which Shakespeare, in this first conversation, secures our pity for Mamillius, the frank and princely son of Leontes. He is soon to die of sorrow for his mother; and the appearance of him is so slight in the play that it seems difficult to make us feel tragically for his death. Therefore, at the beginning, he is drawn by Camillo in so happy and bright a light, that we long for him to live. We see the gallant boy, the promise of the kingdom, riding on the top of the wave of youth. This first sketch is afterwards intensified by that all-charming scene between him and his mother, in which Shakespeare immortalises boyhood. There is nothing more attractive in his work. And then, in a few days, this gallant piece of nature, who 'made old hearts fresh,' is dead of grief and shame, and by a father's guilt. All other genius in literature lowers its helm before such masterly sketching as this. Yet Shakespeare's finish is just as masterly.

Then the second scene takes us at once into the breaking of the friendship between the kings, into the sudden rising into storm of the jealousy of Leontes. Sudden in its explosion, it had been long growing, unconsciously, in his heart. Its origin is slight; the foremost character of jealousy is unreasonableness; yet Shakespeare, with his fine skill, does not leave it without some motive. He makes it spring out of the frank, impetuous, unself-conscious character of Hermione. She speaks as freely and affectionately to Polixenes as she would to a brother. Her husband has asked her to do this. Then, she is at ease with her husband's early friend, and talks to him on that common ground with the freedom of unconscious innocence. Moreover, she has lived in these pleasant relations with him for nearly a year. He is going, and refuses to stay. Leontes has asked his wife to persuade him to stay. He sees her press him, touch his hand; scattered drifts of slight suspicions coalesce; and in a moment jealousy leaps from smouldering ash into roaring flame. It is the way of that selfish passion.

Leontes creeps up to them; the spying of jealousy, one of its most degrading but constant habits, has begun. Then Shakespeare marks its outburst in a single phrase. 'Is he won yet?' asks Leontes. Hermione answers, 'He'll stay, my lord!' And Leontes growls to himself, 'At my request he would not.' Jealousy, we see, is native to Leontes. It arises from within. But up to this time it has been a sleeping devil in him. Till now the jealous nature has had no reason to awaken. No one has, till now, met his wife on equal terms. But, at last, partly motivated by friendship having changed into weariness and nervous disgust, it rises furiously and destroys for a time everything but itself; all other passions, thoughts, and memories; his wife, his child, his friends, his courtesy, his reason. It awakens the brutality which we derive

from the brutes and which civilisation subdues. Jealousy is always subject to foul thoughts, and it pleases its anger to express them with the savage grossness Leontes uses. It makes him also fierce and cruel as a tiger. It forces him to suspect the goodness of his friends; makes him his own scorn, and the ridicule of the world. And finally, it crushes out all the noble qualities of his nature, even his honour, and is absolute tyrant.

The nature of Leontes is naturally noble; that we see afterwards. Even Paulina (and after she has known his crimes) confesses his nobility. But his nature is also weak; he is weak even in his repentance. Violence, it is said, goes with weakness; and the more furious the violence, the greater the weakness.<sup>1</sup> Again, violence is often the refuge of that ignorance of what to do in trouble which results from the wavering of weak-mindedness. Then, again, the weak man knows he is weak, and is violent, as Richard II. was, to hide his weakness from himself, or to prove himself strong. He who knows his strength has no desire to prove what he knows, and is quiet.

Excess of passion adds a new weakness to the natural weakness of Leontes. 'I have *tremor cordis* on me,' 'My heart dances, but not for joy—not joy.' Enervated by unbroken happiness, he has no guard against the invasion of jealousy. It reaches its full and maddest height in him. There is not one touch of any other passion, of any other thought but jealous thought, while the tempest lasts. He is not a man; he is jealousy itself.

This tempest of passion is brief: it dies as suddenly as it arose. Evil naturally exhausts itself, and all the more

<sup>1</sup> These studies of violence as weakness are frequent in Shakespeare. For example, at the back of the pride and raging of Coriolanus, which he mistakes for strength, there is a weakness of character of which Shakespeare, with great skill, makes us feel that his mother and his friends were conscious.



if the nature it attacks be good. And Leontes, originally a good but weak man, repents with as much passion as he sinned. But a good passion does not exhaust itself; on the contrary it grows in power. And then, the wrongdoer, having done deeds meet for repentance, gets the good, but not till then, of the evil trouble he has battled through. He suffers the inevitable punishment, but he conquers a higher goodness than he had when as yet his goodness was untried. And in the end Leontes attains full purification. Weakness in him becomes strength; pride, humility; remorse, repentance; sudden judgments, temperate acts; sorrow, sympathy with others; punishment, a means of progress; violence, steadfast obedience to law. As to his native jealousy, it has been worked through. It cannot occur again. And its complete destruction means the destruction also of the other evil passions. When one passion, raised to its highest pitch of evil force, has been extinguished, there is no need to care about conquering the others. They are already beaten. For the thing to crush, in order to be self-conqueror, is not the passions, but their excess; and if we conquer excess in one, we conquer it in all. For then we have strengthened the will to win the good which is opposite to the evil in which we have been entangled; and if we have made the will strong, it is as strong against all the passions as it has been against one. The work is done, and needs not twice doing. The whole nature of Leontes is tempered into steadfast calm.

Some might expect that emotion, through over-indulgence of which he had erred, would be (in this passage into quietude) chilled; that temperance of feeling might be equivalent to coldness of heart. But that is not the truth of things. Feeling is made deeper by restraint of it. It were well to compare Leontes' affections and their expression in the first act with the same affections and

their expression in the fifth act. Quiet intensity now belongs to them.

Some have complained of the suddenness of this jealous outbreak. But I have already hinted that Shakespeare intended us to understand that it had been brooding for a long time. Suspicions had arisen and been put aside. But at last they concentrated, and then the volcanic forces, long repressed, broke into full fury. Here, in less than a day, Leontes dishonours, and to a friend, the wife he has known for many years; degrades his son, employs the blackest treachery against his friend, urges murder on his councillor, all to glut his revenge. Polixenes then escapes with Camillo, and their flight is new fuel to the passion of Leontes. It proves to him the guilt of Polixenes.

From this scene of base passion we change to one of homelike peace and charm, in the room where Hermione and her son are talking. Her motherhood is in tune with her frank and open character. The boy is her very son, as fearless, as natural as she is. He plays with his mother as if she were not only his mother but his friend. A pleasant chaff passes between them, full of charm. This sweet and deep friendship enhances the natural piety of the child to his mother; brings a greater weight and delight to the boy's affection; and together they account for the intensity of love and sorrow which afterwards breaks Mamillius' heart when he learns his mother's fate and is forced to abhor his father. Poor little man!—orphaned of both his parents while they are still alive. No wonder his gallant brightness is quenched in death!

This gracious interlude, in which the name and intention of the play are given by Mamillius;

A sad tale's best for winter:

I have one of sprites and goblins,

is in full dramatic contrast with the pity and terror of the

next, when Leontes breaks in like a maniac upon its peace, resolute to denounce his wife before his lords. He does not speak to her at first, but dwells on that flight of Polixenes with Camillo which proves to him that his suspicions are just. Sick with universal mistrust, disbelieving everything except his own opinion, blind with passion and hatred, writhing under the belief that he is the object of universal ridicule, he speaks—

How blest am I

In my just censure, in my true opinion !  
 Alack, for lesser knowledge ! How accur'd  
 In being so blest ! There may be in the cup  
 A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,  
 And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge  
 Is not infected ; but if one present  
 The abhor'd ingredient to his eye, make known  
 How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides,  
 With violent hefts. *I have drunk, and seen the spider.*  
 Camillo was his help in this, his pandar :  
 There is a plot against my life, my crown ;  
 All's true that is mistrusted : that false villain  
 Whom I employ'd was pre-employ'd by him :  
 He has discover'd my design, and I  
 Remain a pinch'd thing ; yea, a very trick  
 For them to play at will.

A devastated soul ! Charged with these fierce emotions, he drags her son away from his wife, accuses her of adultery, and that with hideous brutality in gesture, and in the grossest words. Jealousy—and it is another of its marks—takes away even the sense of honour—honour, the last thing that leaves a fallen gentleman. In shaming his wife before the lords, he dishonours his name and rank. It is worth while—in pursuance of Coleridge's distinction between the jealousies of Othello and Leontes<sup>1</sup>—to compare Leontes' consistent brutality and his firm belief in Hermione's guilt as growing out of a nature

<sup>1</sup> I have used in the text that most admirable note in which Coleridge compared the jealousy of Leontes and Othello. No one could help using it.

to which jealousy is native, with the bursts of tenderness which intrude into Othello's fierceness, and with his wavering belief in Desdemona's guilt as proceeding from a nature to which jealousy is not native. Leontes leaps from within himself into all the horrors of jealousy. Othello is slowly dragged into them from without.

Hermione's conduct and speech under the storm are those of a woman as strong as Leontes is weak. At first it is blank astonishment: 'What is this? sport?' This is followed by a grave indignation with the husband, couched in words of deep respect to the King—

How will this grieve you  
When you shall come to clearer knowledge that  
You thus have publish'd me! Gentle my lord,  
You scarce can right me throughly then to say  
You did mistake.

There's some ill planet reigns;  
I must be patient till the heavens look  
With an aspect more favourable. Good my lords,  
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex  
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew  
Perchance shall dry your pities: but I have  
That honourable grief lodg'd here which burns  
Worse than tears drown: . . .

. . . Adieu, my lord:  
I never wish'd to see you sorry; now  
I trust I shall.

Any man but one poisoned with jealousy, another characteristic of which is to make all things but itself seem false, would see that this woman was true, and that truth was her deepest desire. The noble expression of her guiltless sorrow convinces the lords of her innocence. But every word she says, so blinding is his passion, adds fuel to the fire in Leontes, as afterwards in the trial-scene; and, at last, he is left among his courtiers, utterly alone, and alone in his opinion, assuming on his own head the whole evidence of his wife's guilt. Shakespeare is careful to keep up this insane blindness of jealousy, even when

the gods, by the oracle, declare the innocence of Hermione.  
His passion denies the gods—

There is no truth at all i' the oracle :  
The sessions shall proceed ; this is mere falsehood.

The third scene in the second act is a revelation, not only of the fierce sleeplessness and incessant disquietude, but also of the cruelty, of jealousy. Hermione has been delivered in prison of a girl. Paulina brings the child to Leontes and calls on him to recognise it. But before she comes in, we look into the soul of Leontes, full of an awful restlessness, only to be hushed by blood. Nothing but the cruel death of those who have tortured him can quiet that. Polixenes is out of his power. Let Hermione and her brat be burnt alive. Then half his pain may pass.

Nor night, nor day, no rest : it is but weakness  
To bear the matter thus ; mere weakness. If  
The cause were not in being,—part o' the cause,  
She the aduress ; for the harlot king  
Is quite beyond mine arm, out of the blank  
And level of my brain, plot-proof ; but she  
I can hook to me : say that she were gone,  
Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest  
Might come to me again. Who's there ?

All that follows is full of horror and pity. The dreadful imputation of his belief in his wife's unchastity to his little son who is really dying for love of his mother ; his attack on Paulina's honesty of life, on the loyalty of his lords ; his character, his very blood poisoned by his madness ; even the pitiable phrase, 'I am a feather for each wind that blows,' said because he saves the child from the fire only to expose it to the wild beasts—the slightest variation from the worst cruelty of the passion seeming to him the acme of changeableness—all reveal, with magnificent penetration and execution, the overwhelming way in which the vengefulness of jealousy has

sucked everything in his world' into itself, and yet is hungry still.

Then the scene changes, and the third act opens with the bright air and peace of the description of Delphi.

The climate's delicate, the air most sweet,  
Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing  
The common praise it bears.

This happy, gentle picture relieves the mind, oppressed with the furies of the last act. Moreover, the description of the grave and reverent priests and sacrifice at Delphi prepares us by its solemn ceremony for the gravity of the Court of Trial, and the divine deliverance of the innocent Queen.

Hermione's defence raises higher the solemn note. It is dignified as from a Queen, but even more dignified as from her innocence. It avows, with her own frank boldness, her loving friendship for Polixenes. It appeals to heaven; nor does she doubt, as she looks straight at the King with indignant purity,

but innocence shall make  
False accusation blush, and tyranny  
Tremble at patience.

She appeals to the King himself and to her past life with him; her honour has always been unstained. It is a passing revelation of her quiet intellect, steady in the midst of danger, when she allows, as if it were an abstract question, the truth of her husband's remark, when he brutally answers her self-defence

LEON. I ne'er heard yet  
That any of these bolder vices wanted  
Less impudence to gainsay what they did  
Than to perform it first.

HER. That's true enough;  
Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me.

Nor is her half-contempt of her husband, who could be so swept into folly by the phantoms of his imagination,

less a revelation of her innocence, her good sense, her intellectual repose—

You speak a language that I understand not :  
My life stands in the level of your dreams,  
Which I'll lay down.

Her acceptance of death is as splendid in form as it is quiet in speech. She loves life but not life dishonoured by Leontes; she loves her honour that now she defends by a last appeal,

I do refer me to the oracle :  
Apollo be my judge.

The oracle is read; it speaks her innocence. Leontes, it declares, is a jealous tyrant; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject. Then the last wave of the jealous fury breaks in foam against the very gods: 'There's no truth at all in the oracle,' shouts Leontes.

On this final insolence the servant comes in to tell that Mamillius is dead, and dead through 'mere conceit and fear of the Queen's speed.' This quick misfortune at last shocks Leontes out of his madness, and convinces him of the truth of the oracle.

Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves  
Do strike at my injustice.

So desperately blind is jealousy, that only the gods themselves and their oracle, backed up by the death of his son, can open the eyes of Leontes. Then his repentance is as swift as his evil, and that swiftness is in his character.

Were the play to be a tragedy, it should have ended here with the death of Leontes. His heart should have broken. But this is to be a *Winter's Tale*, and we pass to that which would be superfluous had it been a tragedy—the entrance of Paulina to pour out her indignation on Leontes, and to tell him that the Queen is dead. The scene is needed to bring out the deep penitence of the King, to prepare us for his future happiness—sixteen

years away—and to make clear that his guilt is not rooted in his nature, but the result of a sudden storm of evil overwhelming a nature naturally noble. Paulina makes us feel this. She repents her rage as he repents. As she speaks peace to him, a hope steals in that all may not be so wrong as we think. Her wrath is the last effort of the storm. When she forgives, the storm dies down, and the scene ends in a strain of quiet sorrow.

But during this hurricane of base passion what destruction has been wrought! Hermione is given for dead. Mamillius, the heir of the crown, is dead. Antigonus is in exile and is slain. The long friendship of the kings is broken. Camillo, Leontes' most trusty councillor, is gone. The new-born babe is exposed to the wild beasts. Leontes stands alone. The desert country near the sea, in which Perdita is cast away, is not more a desert than his life.

The fate of only one element in the story remains uncertain—the fate of the new-born child whom Leontes has given to Antigonus to cast away. In this little seed is the redemption of the past hidden. What the guilt of jealousy's selfish love has wrought is to be undone by the unselfish love of Florizel and Perdita, of the son of Polixenes and the daughter of Hermione.

The story of the child is told in the last scene of the third act. This scene, where the shepherds find the child and carry it home, links the first three acts (even after the lapse of sixteen years) to the fourth and fifth. The saved child is the girl of the fourth act.

Not only in this is the art of the dramatist seen, but also in the continuance of the stormy atmosphere through which we have passed. It would not be in tune to introduce now the lovely peace of the fourth act; and the child, born in the tempest of passion, is cradled in the tempest of the elements. "The ship which carried her is wrecked with all on board. Antigonus, who did the



wicked will of the King, is devoured by a wild beast, and Hermione (to knit this scene to what has gone before) appears in a dream to Antigonus and prophesies his death.

I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,  
So fill'd and so becoming : in pure white robes,  
Like very sanctity, she did approach  
My cabin where I lay ;

Our eyes are filled with the image of the motherhood of the abandoned child. It is a touch of the finest art.

Antigonus lays down the child on the earth : ' Blossom, speed thee well.' His cruel death is somewhat excused by his belief, even after his dream, in the guilt of Hermione, and by his crude obedience to the hateful command of the King to expose the child. The storm begins, the day darkens, the heavens are wroth with the cruelty of man. Antigonus flies from the savage clamour of the wild beast that devours him, and the shepherds come in to find the child. The scene ends with their rustic talk, full of quaint humour and peasant wisdom. Coarse and homespun as the speeches are of the Shepherd and the Clown, yet the true humour in them redeems their coarseness. The only infamous coarseness is that which has no humour. Moreover, after the tornado of passion in which we have lived at the court, we are relieved to find ourselves in the honest life of the country, among clownish wits. As we listen to the rude talk of the shepherds, we presage the simple, peaceful, working, and festive life of the country folk, in the midst of which we shall, in the next act, find Perdita set like a pearl in a rough-grained shell.

Time, the Chorus, now calls on us to pass over sixteen years, and the fourth act opens with a dialogue between Polixenes and Camillo. The dialogue, as it takes up one matter after another, shows and clears the way for the renewed action of the drama. We hear first of Camillo's

longing to return to Sicilia, and this is afterwards used to supply means for the flight of the lovers; secondly, the suggestion is made of a reknitting of the broken friendship of the two kings, and we begin to expect the close; thirdly, the loves of Florizel and Perdita are discussed by Polixenes and Camillo who determine to visit in disguise the shepherd's farm on the feast-day. We know what will come of that. Polixenes will break up the unequal love-affair.

The first conversation thus prepares us for all that follows. It is Shakespeare's way: 'Expectation, not surprise.' And our pleasure, as we listen, is in seeing how he will work out the matter, and what emotion he will charge it with, and convey to us. That also was the way of the great Greek dramatists. The Athenian audience knew beforehand all the events of the play. Their interest was not in the story, but in the manner it was presented.

However, we do not get at once into the heart of the action, and of the lovers. Shakespeare prepares us for his idyll by a scene between Autolycus and the Clown, Perdita's supposed brother. The song of Autolycus strikes the keynote of the rustic life we are to enter, in which flowers and the singing of birds are dear to maids and lovers, in which rude wit makes holiday, and which is afterwards wrought into perfect melody by the exquisite tongue of Perdita, and by the play of tender mirth and romantic love between her and Florizel. Even to Autolycus there is pleasure in the daffodils that begin to peer when the sweet of the year comes in, though the *tirra-lirra* of the lark only minds him of ale and sport in the hayfield. But then he is a gay good-for-nothing who brings the cunning of the city into the simplicity of the country. When the Clown appears, the business of the feast appears; and, with pleasant art, Perdita's open hand,

her happy extravagance in joy, and her love of lovely things, are sketched by her brother. 'What will this sister of mine do with so much rice. But my father hath made her mistress of the feast, and she lays it on. She hath made me four-and-twenty nosegays for the shearers.' This is a great artist's sketch. The finished picture is to come.

I do not wish to interrupt the close, therefore I shall take here Autolycus and the Clown. Autolycus is the incarnate rogue. He has come down from Greek-land, but he is English also, and Elizabethan. He lives on the simplicity of the world, and thinks he is right in that. The world, he thinks, exists for rogues. And indeed, he is so frank of his roguery, and enjoys it so heartily, that it is easy not to be angry with him. We begin to think that he and his fellow-sinners are of use in the world. Indeed, if there were none like him, dull people might never become intelligent.

But the best excuse for him, and his excellent use, is his gaiety. Nothing interferes with that, nothing darkens it. He has been degraded from the court for dishonesty; he is a piece of a coward; he is, now and then, for practice of his art, something of a sneak, but he is as gay as a cuckoo who has been a fraud from the beginning. And the world is so stupid, that it is thankful for the rogue, provided he makes it mirth; so uninventive, that it likes the imaginative liar; so lazy, that the hustling of the rogues is excellent for its activity. Nothing can be better done than his fooling and robbing of the Clown, especially if we read what is said with our eyes on the stage. All he says supplies by-play for the actor.

While he is stealing in this scene, we are conscious, with delight, that Autolycus is playing with his own wit, and rejoicing that he is cheating so admirably. When the Clown is gone, he breaks out into self-gratulation.

I'll be with you at your sheep-shearing too. If I make not this cheat bring out another, and the shearers prove sheep, let me be unrolled, and my name put in the book of virtue.

He has entered on the scene, singing; and the song shows he is not without some enjoyment of nature. Shakespeare knew that if a man be naturally merry, and has good health, and also the want of conscience which, in slight natures, so often accompanies good health, roguery does not prevent him from having pleasure in sweet air and the songs of birds, from feeling the charm of the spring dancing in his blood, from having a vague happiness in the beautiful world. Indeed, Nature herself, having no conscience, unmorality, like that of the Greek nymphs and fauns, is in good tune with her. It is preoccupation with ourselves, not wrong-doing, which prevents us from enjoying her. Hear how Autolycus finishes the scene—

‘Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,  
And merrily hent the stile-a ;  
A merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad tires in a mile-a.’

Yet Shakespeare felt that he must say something about conscience, give us some hint how it happens that Autolycus is happy, and yet such a rascal. And one pregnant touch explains it. ‘Beating and hanging are terrors for me; for the life to come, I sleep out the thought of it.’ Coleridge objects to that; I think it hits the very white of the matter. Moreover, Autolycus, if a whiff of conscience troubles him, gets rid of the trouble of it, as many of us do, by confession of his roguery to himself—priest and penitent in one—by absolving himself, after he has blamed himself. The moral burden is lifted off when he describes himself, to the Clown, by name, as a rascal, whipped out of the court for his vices, and settled into roguery.

It is not only bodily health, but intellectual quickness

that makes his life happy. There is not one touch of noble thought or delicate feeling from end to end of Autolycus. He is strictly kept within his low, monkey-inspired range; but within that he is clever, imaginative when he is lying, and always ravished with his own tricky intelligence. His quickness gives as much pleasure to the world as to himself. When the servant comes to report his arrival at the feast, we see how he has ravished the simple rustics.

O master! if you did but hear the pedlar at the door, you would never dance again after a tabor and pipe; no, the bagpipe could not move you. He sings several tunes faster than you'll tell money; he utters them as he had eaten ballads and all men's ears grew to his tunes.

Why, he sings over his lawns and ribbons as they were gods and goddesses. You would think a smock were a she-angel, he so chants to the sleeve-hand, and the work about the square on 't.

When he is among them, he boldly risks their unbelief with marvels of lying, preferring the fun of his rogue-imagination to even the money he wins by it. He is the life and soul of all the homely foolery of the feast; and though he robs everybody, he makes everybody happy.

But afterwards, when, dressed in Florizel's clothes, he passes himself off as a courtier to the Clown and Shepherd, he is a rogue out of his element, and both seem to detect something out of place in him. 'This cannot be but a great courtier,' says the Clown, a vague doubt in his mind. The Shepherd, being older, is not so credulous. 'His garments are rich, but he wears them not handsomely.' Shakespeare knew how keen the English rustic was, and he marks it in this single phrase. But Autolycus, by terrible lying, gets the better of them; and yet is the cause of the secret of the play being discovered. He is, though he is no less a rogue, of this use, at least, in the play.

Lastly, his self-delight in his roguery raises it almost into the dignity of a profession. He is Hermes, fallen from his high estate, into evil times, and modern ways. When he has sold all his pedlar's pack, and robbed most of the purses at the sheep-shearing, his success proves to him that honesty is ridiculous. 'Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is! And Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman!' Then, afterwards, when he is drawn in to help the Prince and Perdita, and sees, in revealing their secret, new ways of getting fortune open, he cries that the very gods have been changed by his cleverness to his side, that Fortune has made the time lucky for thieves.

I see this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive. Sure, the gods do this year connive at us, and we may do anything extempore. . . . If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune would not suffer me : she drops booties in my mouth.

Set over against this flashing bit of roguery is the dull, honest, good-natured Clown, who believes in every one; who, the moment he is turned into a courtier, believes he is at all points a fine gentleman; and lords it over Autolycus in a fashion which, because he is good and honest, has indeed some touches of the gentleman. When we first meet him, in the fourth act, a single phrase marks the uneducated clown. He is casting up the expenses of the feast. 'I cannot do it,' he says, 'without counters.' Another phrase, when he is in his new estate—as Perdita's supposed brother—places his whole mind before us. 'Hark! the Kings and the Princes, *our kindred*, are going to see the Queen's picture.'

And now in the fourth act, we hear the story of the love of Perdita and Florizel. No scene in these dramas is more delicate in imagination, sweeter with youthful love. We breathe the old idyllic air, scented with the breath of flowers. All our country sights and sounds are there, and the dew that drenches them is the dew

of young passion, pure, ardent; and its tenderness is gay. We walk on the grass; the garden is near at hand that Perdita has tended; the tents and tables are set out in the open air, the brightness of May is over the feast; and there, at last, is Perdita amidst the flowers, herself a flower of grace, weaving in her hands the garland which is to become a crown. The rustic dance and fun, the songs and chaff of the men mingle with the hospitable, homely courtesy of the Shepherd, with the singing of Autolycus. The pastoral life of Stratford is before us, the feast in the meadows where the sheep are wandering. Shakespeare, we feel, is happy in it.

In the midst are Florizel and Perdita, like two rose-trees in a garden of herbs. They are high-born, and they become their rank. Shakespeare, in an age when high-birth honoured itself, makes their birth shine in their words and ways. Florizel is known by Camillo and Polixenes, who are now present in disguise, for what he is; but Perdita is not known, save as a girl who has always lived among the shepherds. Shakespeare keeps her princess at every point but pride. To Florizel, as he looks at her, the sheep-shearing is as a meeting of the petty gods, and she the Queen of it. Polixenes, though angry with her, cannot resist her charm. He calls her 'enchantment,' and sees in her more than she seems—

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever  
Ran on the green sward; nothing she does or seems  
But smacks of something greater than herself;  
Too noble for this place.

Her talk belongs to her native nobleness. She has, like the shepherdesses of Sidney's pastoral, drunk from the classic spring, and this little learning is exalted into poetic beauty by her gracious character, her imagination of beauty, and by the uplifting impulse of her love. All the world knows how exquisite, how creative is her

speech as she comes to meet her guests, half-buried in her flowers :

O Proserpina !

For the flowers now that frightened thou let'st fall  
From Dis's wagon ! daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty ; violets dim,  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes  
Or Cytherea's breath ; pale prime-roses,  
That die unmarried, ere they can behold  
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady  
Most incident to maids ; bold oxlips and  
The crown imperial ; lilies of all kinds,  
The flower-de-luce being one. O ! these I lack,  
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,  
To strew him o'er and o'er !

Added to this poetic beauty is the grace of native intellect. She holds her own with Polixenes when he discusses the mutual relation of nature and art. Her sight of the knot of a difficulty is always clear, and so is her solution of it. This is the mother's intellect in the child. Then, her love for Florizel is confessed as simply, with as little care for what others think of her, as her mother confessed her friendship with Polixenes. In this handing down of similarity of character, Shakespeare is perhaps scientifically and certainly poetically right ; and he supports this idea of his throughout the rest of the play. Perdita, with a difference, descends from her mother.

The noble frankness in her confession of love when Florizel asks, if she will strew flowers over him, as over a corse, is divinely beautiful.

FLOR.

What ! like a corse ?

PER.

No, like a bank for love to lie and play on ;  
Not like a corse ; or if,—not to be buried,  
But quick and in mine arms.

When Florizel answers, his love lifts him to her level, and he speaks the finest praise of a maiden ever spoken ;



What you do  
 Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,  
 I'd have you do it ever : when you sing,  
 I'd have you buy and sell so ; so give alms ;  
 Pray so ; and, for the ordering your affairs,  
 To sing them too : when you do dance, I wish you  
 A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do  
 Nothing but that ; move still, still so,  
 And own no other function : each your doing,  
 So singular in each particular,  
 Crowns what you are doing in the present deed,  
 That all your acts are queens.

Even the old Shepherd, when he tells of their affection, is so moved by its beauty that he slides into poetry. Had the Shepherd been too home-spun then in speech, he would have lowered the note of the scene. Yet what he says is not pitched too high ;

He says he loves my daughter ;  
 I think so too : for never gaz'd the moon  
 Upon the water as he'll stand and read  
 As 'twere my daughter's eyes ; and, to be plain,  
 I think there is not half a kiss to choose  
 Who loves the other best.

Nor is it less in Shakespeare's manner of expressing love in early youth—such love as speaks in Romeo—that Florizel, towards the close of the scene, breaks into an extravagance of words, exhausts himself in a rush of metaphors, in the vain attempt to paint his inexpressible love :

O ! hear me breathe my life  
 Before this ancient sir, who, it should seem,  
 Hath sometime lov'd : I take thy hand ; this hand,  
 As soft as dove's down and as white as it,  
 Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow  
 That's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er.

Be witness to't, you and he and more than he, and men,

the earth, the heavens, and all ;  
 That, were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,  
 Thereof most worthy, were I the fairest youth  
 That ever made eye swerve, had force and knowledge

More than was ever man's, I would not prize them  
 Without her love ; for her employ them all ;  
 Commend them and condemn them to her service  
 Or to their own perdition.

To this outburst what an answer is Perdita's? She is all but silent, for Florizel has said so much ; but her little phrase is as passionate as his words, and broken at every pause with emotion—

I cannot speak  
 So well, nothing so well ; no, nor mean better :  
 By the pattern of mine own thoughts I cut out  
 The purity of his.

The one touch where Florizel carries too far this love of his, so as to be lower in right feeling than he ought to be, is where he is made in presence of his father to speak of his father's death. 'One being dead,' he says, 'I shall have more than you can dream of yet.' It is true, this accounts for the violence of his father's anger. On hearing it, Polixenes, after an attempt to control himself by reasoning with Florizel, breaks out into such a fury with every one that it almost seems as if Shakespeare, having represented in Leontes jealousy overwhelming reason, intended in Polixenes here to represent a swift storm of anger in which all reasonableness is destroyed.

At any rate, this is the central point of the action of the second part of the play. It shatters all the air-built castles of the young lovers. Perdita and Florizel take the blow differently, but each in character. Perdita is, as Coleridge said, more than exquisite in her way. Her good-breeding comes forth, under these circumstances, as love's democratic feeling. The sun looks on the cottage, she says, as brightly as on the court. Her love lifts her above all fear. She sweeps through change after change of feeling and temper, being a little confused by the shock. A momentary touch of contending sorrow and love makes her turn to Florizel—'Will't please you, sir, be gone?'

Then quickly she breaks down into grief, into a memory of her presentiments in the past, into a half-reproach to Florizel, into a half-ironical self-pity and self-scorn that she should have given herself up to this foolish hope for happy love.

Even here undone !

I was not much afeard ; for once or twice  
 I was about to speak and tell him plainly,  
 The self same sun that shines upon his court  
 Hides not his visage from our cottage, but  
 Looks on alike. Will 't please you, sir, be gone ?  
 I told you what would come of this : beseech you,  
 Of your own state take care : this dream of mine—  
 Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,  
 But milk my ewes and weep.

But Florizel is equal to the moment. His love overmasters his father's anger, his hope of the throne, imprisonment, poverty, death itself. He resolves on, and plans, his flight with Perdita. The world is well lost for his love—

Why look you so upon me ?

I am but sorry, not afeard ; delay'd,  
 But nothing alter'd. What I was, I am.

There is a parallel in this firm intensity of love to the madness of Leontes in the first act. In the case of Leontes a bad passion hurries him into a world of death. In the case of Florizel a good passion hurries him into a world of life. Both passions are represented as reaching a height in which reason is in abeyance ; and though I do not say that Shakespeare, of set purpose, contrasted here a noble and an ignoble passion when they were both in flood ; yet he does, in the rush of his genius, make it clear that the being carried away by a noble passion is as right as being carried away by a base passion is wrong.

Leontes sacrifices everything to his jealousy, and ruins his own life and the lives of others. Florizel sacrifices

everything to his pure love, and the resolve produces the circumstances which restore all that the jealousy of Leontes has ruined. The common world would say that Florizel's conduct was madness. He himself believes his folly better reason than the world's judgment. When Perdita says, she knew her dignity would last but till 'twere known, he answers with the charming extravagance of young love

It cannot fail but by  
The violation of my faith ; and then  
Let nature crush the sides o' the earth together  
And mar the seeds within ! Lift up thy looks  
From my succession wipe me, father ; I  
Am heir to my affection.

Be advis'd,' says Camillo ;

FLOR. I am ; and by my fancy : if my reason  
Will thereto be obedient, I have reason ;  
If not, my senses, better pleas'd with madness,  
Do bid it welcome.

CAM. This is desperate, sir !

Just what every one thought of Leontes ; but how different ! Again, I drew attention to that phrase of Leontes, 'I am a feather for each wind that blows,' in which, because he modified the burning of the babe to exposure in a desert, he seemed to himself, so fierce was the single-eyed demand of his tyrant passion, to be as inconstant as a feather in a veering wind. So Florizel here, over-mastered by his deep feeling, thinks, when Camillo induces him to make a slight alteration in his first plan of flight, that he is the very slave of chance. He is really moving like an arrow to his point, shot from the strained bow of his will, yet he says

We profess  
Ourselves to be the slaves of chance and flies  
Of every wind that blows.

In this resemblance of his metaphor to that of Leontes is the unconscious art of genius, and it confirms the parallel I have drawn.

And now, how, in this sudden crisis, does Perdita appear? As Hermione would have done in girlhood! I have already marked some touches of this descent of character. There are others of the same kind. When she refuses, in the sheep-shearing scene, to plant streaked gillyvors in her garden, because 'there is an art which in their piedness shares with great creating Nature,' she thinks, like Hermione, that to slip from the natural is to slip from truth. But when Polixenes proves that the art itself is nature, then, just as Hermione in the trial scene acknowledged as an abstract truth a rough remark of Leontes—'That's true enough, though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me'; so here, Perdita's intellect, thinking of the argument, answers, 'So it is.' But for all that, her instinctive love of Nature's freedom to follow her own ways will have nothing to do with that which her reason allows. Polixenes thinks he has won her over, because she confesses the weight of his argument—

POLIX. Then make your garden rich in gillyvors.

'I'll not put,' answers Perdita with a flash, 'the dibble in the earth to set one slip of them.' When Hermione was young, she would have said the same, and with the same impetuosity.

Her passionate love, her soft tenderness do not affect her intellect. Like Hermione, she is quite clear-eyed; keen to divide the true from the false; quiet, through good sense, in hours of confused trouble. In the midst of the hurry of flight and of changing plans, Perdita, like her mother—whose intellect, even in the deepest grief, is always detached to meet with coolness the point at

issue—can stay to correct a view of life put forward by Camillo, who says—

Besides, you know  
Prosperity's the very bond of love,  
Whose fresh complexion and whose heart together  
Affliction alters.

Perdita sifts the true in it from the untrue, and answers with a noble respect for the soul, resting on whose powers she makes her judgment ;

One of these is true ;  
I think affliction may subdue the cheek,  
But not take in the mind.

'Yea, say you so?' replies Camillo, astonished at this quiet, winnowing intelligence in a girl, now overwhelmed with trouble ;

There shall not at your father's house these seven years  
Be born another such.

And finally, when all is ready, Camillo and Florizel both excited to depart, Perdita is quiet. She has made up her mind as well as her heart. She sees that there is no other way for her, and takes it, undelaying,

I see the play so lies  
That I must bear a part.

So they fly away, and the fifth act opens in Leontes' palace. Sixteen years have gone by since we last saw him, years of sorrow ; and his repentance has kept him true to his wife's memory. He loves her for herself, but more for that he had wronged her. She has concealed herself from him, hoping for the finding of her child, all these years. It seems too severe a punishment for Leontes, accompanied, as it was, by Paulina's bitter tongue. One might even call Hermione hard-hearted, but Shakespeare does not always think that swift forgiveness is one of the remarkable qualities of women.

Leontes has not yet forgiven himself. And his lords

urge him to put aside his penitence and give the State an heir.

Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil ;  
With them forgive yourself.

Leontes listens, but his heart is with the past. It is well: he is thus ready for the resurrection of his wife. Nay, there is passion still in his love. Paulina, in her rough way, thinking that he may yield to his counsellors, says that he 'killed his wife.' His old, swiftly moved nature breaks out, yet with a new gentleness.

Kill'd !

She I kill'd ! I did so ; but thou strik'st me  
Sorely to say I did : it is as bitter  
Upon thy tongue as in my thought. Now, good now,  
Say so but seldom.

That might only be the voice of penitence, even of remorse; and Shakespeare does not think that Leontes would be worthy of the recovery of his wife, or that it would be fitting they should again come together, were there no intensity of love in Leontes' soul. Therefore when his lords beseech him to marry, and Paulina, objecting, paints how he would feel with another woman, if his wife's eyes, passing ghostlike before him, should say, 'Remember mine'; Leontes' deep-seated and yearning passion leaps to the surface;

Stars, stars !

And all eyes else dead coals. Fear thou no wife ;  
I'll have no wife, Paulina.

And Paulina, satisfied, hints, at a coming happiness in Shakespeare's preparing way.

At this point Florizel and Perdita enter with Camillo, bearing in their hands the full horn of the future, the full redemption of the past. Perdita is preceded by the ravishment she creates among the court; 'the most peerless piece of earth that e'er the sun shone bright on.' Spring comes with her into the midst of grey autumn,

love and rapture into the midst of weary sorrow. Leontes cannot turn his eyes from her; the father is drawn by nature to the child whom he knows not.

Then comes the revelation of Perdita's true birth. All the characters are brought together. Polixenes has pursued his flying son. The shepherds bring the bundle which contains the proofs of the child's descent. The broken friendship of the kings is again knit together. And the lovers, following true love, have done it. Only Hermione is not yet here; and Paulina brings the crowd to see her statue. The last scene is in the chapel, when the statue comes to life. It is with exquisite art that, seeing the image of her mother, Perdita is now touched. She cannot speak, but Leontes describes her, while he addresses the statue;

O, royal piece !  
There's magic in thy majesty, which has  
My evils conjur'd to remembrance, and  
From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,  
Standing like stone with thee.

But Perdita recovers, kneels, and speaks

And give me leave,  
And do not say 'tis superstition

—how lovely is the common-sense of this, a touch which recalls her mother's intelligence—

that  
I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady,  
Dear queen, that ended when I but began,  
Give me that hand of yours to kiss.

But the main interest is the meeting of Leontes and Hermione, whom long ago evil passion parted. Leontes' character, in its good, is carefully-maintained. The impetuous cries and action, the feeling so strong in him that it breaks its utterance, the rush of successive emotions, so that they trip up one another, are the same in him as before. Hermione is also unchanged; stately, quiet,



yet impassioned. She hangs in silence on Leontes' neck. She only speaks when she turns to her daughter, for motherhood, we remember, was always deep in her ;

PAUL. Turn, good lady ;

Our Perdita is found.

HER. You gods, look down,

And from your sacred vials pour your graces

Upon my daughter's head ! Tell me, mine own,

Where hast thou been preserv'd ? where liv'd ? how found

Thy father's court ?

And in the phrase 'thy father's court' is contained the pardon of Leontes. So all is at an end. The gods have let evil die, and good live to cure its pain. The music, that bids Hermione be stone no more, plays now the sweet melodies of a new life. Nor is the calm of the close, with its soft tune, out of harmony with the storm of the beginning. The one has grown out of the other. Jealousy divides, love unites—this is the only moral we accept from *A Winter's Tale*.

## X

### THE TEMPEST

*The Tempest* was one of the last, if not the last as some think, of Shakespeare's dramas—of those, that is, entirely written by himself. Even this is doubted, and the *Mask* which Prospero shows to the lovers has sometimes been allotted to another hand. The *Epilogue* is, of course, rejected. By the time of James I. the Masque had become an important affair, with elaborate scenery, dresses, dances, and machinery, and it is possible (to afford time for the representation of the *Mask* in this play) that the original play was abridged by the actors, or that Shakespeare deliberately made it brief. It is, save the *Comedy of Errors*, the shortest of his comedies. Its source, if it had one in a previous drama or a tale, has not been discovered. Earnest searchers have found the origin of one passage in Florio's translation of Montaigne, and some suggestions for Prospero's invocation

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves.

in Ovid, but these are futile discoveries. The name of Setebos, other names, and some details, were possibly borrowed from Eden's *History of Travayle*, 1577; and a book—*The Discovery of the Bermudas, otherwise called the Ile of Divels*—may have suggested to him his island in the undiscovered seas, but Shakespeare needed no suggestion of this kind from books. His books were the people he met. It stands to reason that he had many talks with the captains and sailors who adventured

their lives and fortunes in the Atlantic and Pacific, and who brought back to England wonderful tales of remote islands dwelt in by monsters and fit for a poet's imagination to play with; fit to shape into beauty for the cultured folk, into sea-interest for the 'groundlings.'

The play opens on a ship at sea, in a roaring storm, and amid the shouting of the sailors. I can well imagine how the rude sailors who had worked through the gales of the Spanish main, and who now stood in the pit to listen, cheered and laughed as they heard the boatswain hurry the mariners to their work, and send the passengers, including the King, to their cabins—'What care these roarers for the name of king? To cabin; silence! trouble us not!' In the great tempests of life all men find their place.

As to the island, it ought, of course, to be in the Mediterranean, and commentators have wasted a great deal of time in conjecturing whether it was Malta, Lampedusa, Pantalaria, or Corcyra. It is in the Sea of the Imagination; and its rocks and dells, its nooks where the wave lies calm, nay, Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel, belong to that country which is seen only by the intellectual eye, which is bodied forth from things unknown, but which abides for ever as it was first created, unsubject to the decay that winds and waters, frosts and fire work on the islands of the earth. This island is immortal, though no ship has cast anchor there;

It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,  
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity.

When Prospero and Miranda left it for Milan, and Ariel flitted from it to the freedom of the elements, it was seen no more, save by the high spirit of imagination who has eyes within. And Shakespeare made its scenery quite clear, set in his allusive way; here and

there touching in, throughout the play, its landscape to form a background for his human story. The sea breaks in foam on the strong-based promontories which jut out on either side of the bays where the 'yellow sands' curve inwards, on which Ariel and the sea-nymphs dance. Within the cliffs that overhang, like eyebrows over deep-set eyes, the incoming tides, are deep nooks of calm water into one of which Ariel brings the King's ship, and out of whose profound stillness Prospero called Ariel at night to fetch dew from the 'still-vexed Bermoothes.' Fresh brooks run down to the sea among the knotty pines and mossy oaks which fledge the ridges of the hills. In the scattered groves the grass is lush and lusty, and green, fed by frequent freshes; but outside, beyond the wood of limes near Prospero's cell, where the land is somewhat tilled, there are wide spaces of forest land, full of sharp furzes, pricking gorse and thorns, unwholesome fens and standing pools; and further still, in another part of the isle, desert and uninhabitable land. Since Prospero landed, goblins, and all the tribes of the elves, brought thither by his art, dwell in these wild places. The wolf and the bear live among their rocks, and for many years these frightened beasts heard the cries of Ariel penned in a cloven pine. This is the scenery of the play, and it is the scenery of elfin-land.

Prospero is, beyond his humanity, half a supernatural power, the god of the island; the last image, and the most beautiful, of those mediæval enchanters who, like Vergil and Merlin, bowed to their will the powers of nature. Under his magic spell (which equally controls the souls of men and the elemental spirits) the natural and the supernatural mingle with a perfect ease of interchange, only possible to consummate genius. There is no shock when we pass from the conversation of Prospero and Miranda to the conversation of Prospero and

Ariel. Ariel seems as natural and true a character as Ferdinand; Caliban is accepted as easily as Stephano. We are quite as ready to believe the music in the air, and the harpies who set out and carry away the tables in the wood, and the hounds that hunt Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban, as we are to see Ferdinand changing eyes with Miranda, or Antonio and Sebastian drawing their swords to slay Alonzo. The magic mist broods over the whole play, and touches every character; the island makes its own subtle atmosphere. Prospero himself seems to feel that. When Gonzalo and the rest, at the end, are too confused to realise where they are, he bids them wait a little and recover :

You do yet taste  
Some subtilties o' the isle that will not let you  
Believe things certain ;

and Gonzalo expresses the same thought: We all have found ourselves,

when no man was his own.

No one is free from this magic in the air but Ferdinand and Miranda. True, their 'changing eyes' at first sight is attributed by Prospero to the influence of Ariel, but that was an old man's mistake. There was no necessity for Ariel's help or interference. Love has its own magic, of a more potent spell than any in the book of Prospero. These lovers made their own enchantments, and earn, as Shakespeare wishes us to feel, the wonder of Prospero. The sweet encounter of their souls left far behind his wizardry. Even the life of Ariel, fine spirit as he was, was not so fine as theirs. No lover's talk in Shakespeare's dramas is more beautiful than theirs in the third act, where the innocent love of Miranda, who has never seen a man but her father, is in contrast with that of Ferdinand, who has seen many women and flitted through momentary love of them; but who, on

touching Miranda, is lifted out of his atmosphere of light love, his half-cynical view of women, on to the level of her frank and innocent passion, such as Eve might have felt when first she looked into Adam's eyes. She would free him from his log-bearing service, herself would carry the wood; but the Prince accepts a toil which, under her pitiful eyes, is glorified by love into a delight. And his ravishment is answered by her pure, tender, and childlike admiration and passion, confessing that he is all she desires, all she can conceive of beauty, princeliness, and joy. It is the modest, natural meeting in ardent love of sex and sex, tempered by their duty to honour, morality, and the high traditions of their birth.

We may well observe the exquisite temperance of Shakespeare in all these scenes where Ferdinand and Miranda meet. The delicacy of fine character is not once overstepped in a situation which, in the hands of a poet of less reverence for human nature, might have afforded room for sensational language or coarse innuendo. When Dryden took the subject he vilified it with high-flown talk and vile immodesty. But when Miranda first sees Ferdinand her surprise is absolutely natural and so is her language :

What is 't? A spirit?  
 Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,  
 It carries a brave form :—but, 'tis a spirit.  
 I might call him  
 A thing divine; for nothing natural  
 I ever saw so noble.

And when Prospero calls Ferdinand spy and traitor, she replies, and with equal grace of feeling, intelligence, intuition, and imagination ;

There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple :  
 If the ill spirit have so fair a house,  
 Good things will strive to dwell with 't.

Temperate boldness, modest frankness, innocent admira-

tion! Ferdinand speaks with less naturalness, but with the same temperance of words. It would have been a gross mistake in art if, after the loss of all his shipmates and while he believed his father drowned, he had broken into those hyperboles of love in which Romeo or Florizel indulged. Ferdinand is quiet; his passion moves through sorrow's clouds. This modesty of language here is the result of one of those intuitive judgments of the fitting which make the characters in Shakespeare's work like the work of nature herself. And the intuitive judgment is itself a child of high imagination.

Were he not certain of his power to keep this golden measure, he would not have assumed so difficult a task as the representation of Miranda—a girl ready to love but not knowing it even through the experience of others; ignorant of what men were, save of her father; surprised in a moment into the passion of love and in wonder with it!

Will the artist keep her natural? Will she be womanly without lowering the type of fine womanhood? Will she also represent, in all her ways, the logical result of the circumstances which precede her meeting with Ferdinand? Will everything be taken into account, not by the laboured analysis of the artist, but by his penetrating imagination?

An affirmative answers all these questions. The delicacy of Shakespeare's touch bears him with divine ease through this maze of difficulty. Miranda is at all points in harmony with herself and her situation. She is a princess in manner, yet has never known the court; she is ignorant of life, yet well educated by a scholar; she lives in a preternatural air, yet belongs heart and soul to common humanity; she loves with a complete self-surrender, yet guards her modesty, the reserve of her sex, and her moral dignity.

Prospero protects her, lest she should lose her natural womanhood in any way, from contact with his magic. She knows that he has power over the elements, but this does not influence her soul. She is as natural as if she had never touched the supernatural. Ariel, we observe, is never brought into contact with her. She does not seem to know of his existence. Caliban is natural to her; not a monster, but a base type of man whom she does not love to look upon; and her knowledge of him alone as human outside of her father makes her naïve surprise at seeing Ferdinand all the more natural. 'Is it a spirit?' she cries.

We meet her first on the shore after the tempest, which, Coleridge says, 'prepares and initiates the excitement required for the entire piece.' She has seen the shipwreck, and her pity and tenderness for the poor souls open her heart to us:

O! I have suffer'd  
 With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,  
 Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,  
 Dash'd all to pieces. O! the cry did knock  
 Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perish'd.  
 Had I been any god of power, I would  
 Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er  
 It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and  
 The fraughting souls within her.

A most delightful outbreak of girlish ignorance and logic: she would overturn the earth and sea and all the world to save a few whom she saw die.

This quick sympathy, this charming self-forgetfulness, keeps her free from any introspection, and gives the girl the attractiveness of childhood. All her life, as yet, is in love of her father. When he tells her the tale of his exile with her, her chief interest is in the thought of the trouble she must have given him—

O! my heart bleeds  
 To think o' th' teen that I have turn'd you to,



Which is from my remembrance. . . .

Alack ! what trouble

Was I then to you !

To such an unself-conscious, outward-going nature, the great emotions of life come swiftly. When she hears of Gonzalo's kindness to her father gratitude flies, swift as a swallow, from her heart ;

Would I might

But ever see that man !

When Ferdinand appears Love becomes her master in a moment ; and the charming openness with which it becomes apparent, while yet unconfessed, shows how it has filled her life immediately from end to end. She does not believe, when her father accuses Ferdinand and is harsh to him, that ill can dwell in so fair a house. 'I'll be his surety,' she declares. Under the sway of her swift love she sets herself, even in this first interview, against her father's opinion. There is that in her heart now which is stronger than filial duty, which emancipates her from the dominance of the ancient ties. But this difference with Prospero is so sweetly spoken, so delicate of disposition, so reverential yet so pressing, that she loses nothing of the daughter in the lover. Even when she comforts Ferdinand for her father's hardness she defends her father ;

Be of comfort ;

My father's of a better nature, sir,

Than he appears by speech : this is unwonted,

Which now came from him.

Miranda has no self-introspection in this scene, but that comes, momentarily, with the fulness of love. In that most charming and delicate of love-conversations, when she and Ferdinand meet before Prospero's cell, and he is carrying the logs in enforced service, she looks into herself for the first time and realises her separate life. Shakespeare just touches this. After she has professed

her love, she turns in upon herself. 'Wherefore weep you?' says Ferdinand.

At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer  
 What I desire to give : and much less take  
 What I shall die to want.

But no sooner has she looked into her own heart, than she turns from its inspection to the love she feels for Ferdinand. There, she feels, she loses herself, and that is her greatest joy, the very essence of her nature.

One touch more, at the end, brings the island maiden before our eyes, her natural love of beauty, her delicate wonder and joy, her ravishment with life; and these are all enhanced by the golden air of love in which she moves. We fancy, as we hear her, what she will be in the future; what Milan and Naples will finally say to her white soul, which believes only in good. 'O wonder!' she cries, when she sees Alonzo and the rest of the lords crowded round her father,

How many goodly creatures are there here !  
 How beauteous mankind is ! O brave new world,  
 That has such people in 't !

Ferdinand is not unworthy of her. He comes into the play in the most romantic, most dramatic fashion, and in lovely poetry : Ariel in the air before him, leading him by music, singing delicate songs, full of the spirit of Nature. All the charms of magic beauty attend the destined youth, enhance the coming lover. And his sorrow for his father adds to his appearance a tender, human grace, so attractive that Ariel, with his far-off sympathy with humanity, enshrines it in song. Thus attended with romance he breaks, like a vision, on Miranda—

FER. Where should this music be ? i' th' air or th' earth ?  
 It sounds no more ;—and, sure, it waits upon  
 Some god o' th' island. Sitting on a bank,  
 Weeping again the king my father's wrack,  
 This music crept by me upon the waters,

Allaying both their fury, and my passion,  
 With its sweet air : thence have I follow'd it,—  
 Or it hath drawn me rather,—but 'tis gone.  
 No, it begins again.

*ARIEL sings.*

Full fathom five thy father lies ;  
 Of his bones are coral made :  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes :  
 Nothing of him that doth fade  
 But doth suffer a sea-change  
 Into something rich and strange.  
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell :

*(Burthen)* ding, dong.

Hark ! now I hear them,—ding, dong, bell.

**FER.** The ditty does remember my drown'd father.

This is no mortal business, nor no sound

That the earth owes :—I hear it now above me.

So, through so romantic an entrance, should a true lover come to see his mistress for the first time ; so should his mistress see him first ; so keen, so natural was Shakespeare's dramatic instinct !

At first he is rapt by the music which remembers his father. Then he sees Miranda, and his speech, beginning with mere admiration and the courtesy of a gentleman, suddenly breaks off and flies into love—

Most sure, the goddess

On whom these airs attend !—Vouchsafe, my prayer

May know if you remain upon this island ;

And that you will some good instruction give,

How I may bear me here ; my prime request,

Which I do last pronounce, is,—O you wonder !—

If you be maid or no ?

And, in the joy of it, he thinks light of all he has lost ; of his own weakness when Prospero enchants his strength ; of his imprisonment and toil—

Might I but through my prison once a day

Behold this maid : all corners else o' the earth

Let liberty make use of ; space enough

Have I in such a prison.

A charming lover ! Ferdinand, however, is nothing

more than the lover. When he thinks justly, as when he says

There be some sports are painful, and their labour  
Delight in them sets off; some kinds of baseness  
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters  
Point to rich ends.

his thoughts are those love has put into his head. He had not the capacity for them before love opened his soul. He boasts a little of his regard for several women; his has been a butterfly's life; but now—'Hear my soul speak,' he cries. The rest is boyishness. He will be a man hereafter, because he has met Miranda. He is not yet.

Prospero's narration in the first act of the rebellion of his brother, and how, banished, he and Miranda come to the island, is a masterly preparation for the rest of the play; and it is dramatically varied by his appeals to his daughter and her answers. It is a homelike scene. She sleeps; and Ariel appears. His petition for liberty supplies, rather awkwardly, the motive for another narration; that of Ariel's relation to Prospero; but the awkwardness of the motive is forgotten in the poetic beauty of the tale. The visit to Caliban supplies, less awkwardly, the history of another portion of the past; and both narrations together set us clearly free for the future action of the play. We now know all the past. We see Prospero fully, as he is; with Ariel who loves him on one side, and Caliban who hates him on the other—two creatures of the elements—one of their happy, the other of their hateful, aspects. Prospero is human enough to be interesting in spite of his art. He loves his child. When he speaks to her his words flow into the poetry of admiration.

The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,  
And say what thou seest yond.

That is the way he tells Miranda to look at Ferdinand,

and the pride of a father's love is in the words. He has the wisdom of one who has ruled a great state and stored up experience of mankind. His warning to Ferdinand about Miranda, not given in her hearing, is that of a man of the world to a youth. Solitude, which, when a man has had no sorrow or love, brutalises, teaches tolerance and forgiveness to the man who has experienced both. His love for his child has kept his heart green, and his affections are fresh with the dew of tenderness. He has his enemies in his power. He takes full advantage, with strength and foresight, of his opportunity; a strong, stern man. But when the time comes to punish the guilty, he forgives, after grave reproof; not excusing their crime, but with severe blame attached to it. But, having once forgiven, he forgets. He bids the past bury itself. He will think of it no more. That is the temper of the right forgiver. It is the temper of God Himself. And it is one of the creatures of God, a creature of the elements, not human, not moral in our sense, who leads Prospero to a full forgiveness. When Ariel tells him of the distracted suffering of the King and his followers, and adds that if he saw them, his affections would become tender, Prospero's noble spirit, passing away from vengeance, resolves upon forgiveness. He speaks to Ariel;

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part; the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance; they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel;  
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,  
And they shall be themselves.

There is no trace of the existence of Christianity in the

play, but its main drift is to teach forgiveness; not, of course, directly, but as art teaches, indirectly. This is the note also of *Cymbeline* and of *Winter's Tale*. . If Shakespeare in these plays, and especially in this play, was taking his leave, as some have conjectured, of the stage and the life of the city, it would seem that, having passed perhaps through great trouble or wrong, through anger, it may be through transient cynicism, (we can conjecture much from the temper of the tragedies), he now forgave the world and the gods his suffering; and felt that in the forgiveness he reached fresh life, new happiness, youth in his spirit, sympathy with love; such as we find in Florizel and Perdita, in Miranda and Ferdinand. It is a way forgiveness has of making us alive again, of lifting all sorrow away. It brings with it the restoration of romance. It is well that the greatest intellect, the finest imaginative soul that ever lived in England, should have left this legacy to us as the result of his experience—'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' And it is also well that he should have taken pains to say that when we forgive it should be absolute. The memory of the injury is to perish from the lips, from the heart of the forgiver, for 'the quality of mercy is not strained.'

Let us not burthen our remembrances  
With a heaviness that's gone.

That is the voice of Prospero. I would fain think it the most inmost feeling of Shakespeare's heart when he returned to Stratford, and, in too brief a time, departed to find the great Forgiver.

Ariel, as I said, was with Prospero in this, and I turn to this imagined creature, who, though an embodied part of the Spirit of Nature, is yet not all apart from the human soul. For he knows he has no human soul, and this

knowledge of his apartness proves him capable of conceiving something of that from which he is apart. He has his own affections, and were they human, he says, they would feel with human pain.

Ariel is 'but air,' the free spirit of the air, subtle, changeful, in incessant motion, lively, all-penetrating like the ether, having power in the air and water, in fire, and to the depths of the earth. To-day, we might call him electricity. But, though at many points the conception of Ariel is not apart from that which physical science has concerning the finest forms of matter, a scientific correlation does not fit his spiritual nature. For here, though he does wondrous work, he is a spirit of personal gaiety and self-enjoyment, and loves to play; 'a quaint' and 'tricksy spirit,' like, when he is most himself, the light and fluttering airs of summer. Nor is he only a spirit of the air. He is also a spirit of fine fire; air and fire together, they have but one life in him. He impersonates them both. And as the ethereal forms of matter vibrate between the molecules of the earth and water, so Ariel can live in the seas, and the vapours of the clouds, and in the depths of the earth. It is thus he first appears;

All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curl'd clouds: to thy strong bidding task  
Ariel and all his quality.

He flames amazement in the King's ship, burns like lightning here and there, sets the sea a-fire, is himself the fire, makes the tempest, disperses the fleet, binds and looses the winds, calms their rage, lives in the deep bays of the shore, can run upon the sharp wind of the north, and do business in the veins of the earth when it is baked with frost. He can be at will a nymph of the sea, a

harpy, any shape he pleases. He, like the air, is always invisible, save to the scholar who has mastered him by knowledge. If I were a manager, and put *The Tempest* on the stage, Ariel should only be a voice, no one should represent him. It is terrible to see him done by a dancing girl in a boy's dress. This pervasiveness of his, in and through all nature, extends to man; he knows and feels the thoughts of men as if he were the ethereal element in which the cells of the brain are floating; as if, being this, he would feel what passions also moved and dwelt in the silences of the soul. He knows the plots of the conspirators before they are spoken; he clings to their conscience like a remorse. Prospero has no need to call him by speech. 'Come with a thought,' he cries to Ariel, who is going on his messages. 'Thy thoughts I cleave to,' answers Ariel. He has also the quickness of Thought. Before the eye can close he is round the earth and back again;

I drink the air before me, and return  
Or e'er your pulse twice beat.

This relation of his to thought lifts him above the mere presentation of any natural power. He is not human, but he can relate himself to humanity. It seems as if something of Prospero's soul during their comradeship had infiltrated into Ariel. And the relation, on account of this, between him and Prospero is almost a relation of affection. Prospero admires his charm and beauty, and his gracious ways. 'Fine apparition!' he calls out when he comes in as a nymph of the sea. My 'quaint Ariel!' my 'dainty Ariel,' are the pleasant terms with which his master describes him. When he comes as a harpy, Prospero is delighted with the grace the harpy had, devouring. Prospero recognises something more spiritual in Ariel than his airy charm. He really sympathises with Ariel's longing for liberty. Then also he recalls how,



when the witch Sycorax, having subdued Ariel, laid on him gross and shameful commands, the fine nature of Ariel refused to do them. 'Thou wast,' he says, 'a spirit too delicate

To act her earthly and abhorr'd commands.

This exquisite refinement of nature is then, as it were, a kind of conscience in him. When their one quarrel is over, they are together like friend and friend, even with the love of friendship. Ariel wishes to be loved;

ARI. Do you love me, master? no?

PROS. Dearly, my delicate Ariel!

And when Ariel sings his lively song of freedom, Prospero, charmed, cries out in admiration

Why, that's my dainty Ariel! I shall miss thee;  
But yet thou shalt have freedom.

But far beyond any companionship of feeling with his master is Ariel's longing for freedom, to have his own control. Of course, being a spirit of the unchartered air, he desires only to obey himself. It is a desire harmless in him, whose limits are set by law. But Prospero is a foreign law, and however kindly it be exercised, it is against Ariel's choice, independent of the law of his being. Therefore this bird of the air must escape his cage. All he does in it is toil: 'What? is there more toil?' Outside is joy, the soft life of the summer breeze, for, beyond Prospero's commands, Ariel makes no tempests, no disturbance. He is delicate. Music is his expression; the tabor and pipe, thin sweet instruments, are his to play. He sings, like the light wind through the trees and over the grass of the moor and among the rocks, clear, ringing, elfin notes. All he sings is poetry, all his speech is song. The life he lives is the life of the elements, and his songs are of their doings. Lamb's saying of his song, 'Full fathom five thy father lies,' that it is 'of the water watery, and that its feeling seems to resolve itself into the

element it contemplates,' illustrates this nature in him, and itself is poised in the melody of ocean. His other song—'Come unto these yellow sands'—is so evanescent, so delicate, so rippling, that no criticism can touch it without hurting it. It is of the shore, the moving sand, and the sea. Only when, in the calm of twilight, we see the long-curving edge of half-slumbering foam, when the wave is nothing but the lift of the tide, and hear the hushing murmur of it on the sand, as it leaves the fantastic outline of the height it reached before its retreat—do we understand the delicate playing of Ariel, the dance he leads of sprites that foot it feately here and there.

Come unto these yellow sands,  
And then take hands :  
Curtsied when you have and kiss'd,—  
The wild waves whist,—  
Foot it feately here and there ;  
And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear.

More delicate, dainty, and ethereal is Ariel as the soft summer wafts of air which come and go with fluttering pleasure. They make the faint blossoms tremble where the bee can enter, they rock the cowslip's bell, and stir the fur on the bat's wing, when the owls call to the night.

Where the bee sucks, there suck I  
In a cowslip's bell I lie ;  
There I couch when owls do cry.  
On the bat's back I do fly  
After summer merrily :

This is Ariel's farewell to Prospero, this the life he hopes to live in freedom. That is his true being; aerial gentleness, the spirit of the faint swift winds. The metre helps the conception. The dactyls are like the pulse of wings.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now,  
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

Thus Ariel passes into the elements. But Shakespeare, mastered while he wrote by his shaping spirit of imagination, has made him more than elemental, has given him a

personality, touched with gleams of our humanity, as of old he did, but not so fully, to Oberon. Only Ariel is more elemental than Oberon, and, strange enough, also more human. Prospero has entered into him. Therefore round him collects the greater interest. Oberon we may meet in the woods by moonlight. Ariel is always with us, like the air. We breathe his spirit every day.

Over against him is Caliban, much more human than Ariel, begotten of a witch by an earth-demon; half of his gross father's quality, linked to the baser elements of the earth; half of his mother's wicked humanity. Evil as he is, he is made capable, by Prospero's early education of him, of, perhaps, a higher life in the future. Of this Shakespeare, in his pity, gives us a few hints.

Apart from his human traits, Caliban represents the gross, brutal, unwholesome elements of the earth, those that are the curse and plague of men; and these elements are made more brutal because they are concentrated into one who, himself a savage and descended from a villainous hag, lives solely for his senses and appetites, as deformed in mind as in body. When he is lifted beyond mere sense and appetite by the spirit of hate, he tends to become an evil spirit of the earth, an elemental demon. Then all his curses are of the earth earthy, and of the destroying terrors of the earth.

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd  
 With raven's feather from unwholesome fen  
 Drop on you both! a south-west blow on ye,  
 And blister you all o'er!

All the charms  
 Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!

The red plague rid you,  
 For learning me your language!

All the infections that the sun sucks up  
 From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall, and make him  
 By inch-meal a disease!

That is not only the witch-wickedness of his mother in him; it is also the deadliness of the earth. Shakespeare just touches that much of the supernatural into him. Otherwise, he is no more than the low-type savage, made by his deformity a hater and envier of a higher race. He has the instincts and nature-knowledge of the savage, knows the whole island, all that his mother-earth produces, the freshets, springs, brine pits, the miry fens, the berry-bearing shrubs, the apes that chatter to him, the hedgehogs that prick his feet, the adders that sting and hiss—

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow ;  
 And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts ;  
 Show thee a jay's nest and instruct thee how  
 To snare the nimble marmozet ; I'll bring thee  
 To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
 Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me ?

Like the savage also who lives close to Nature, and impersonates her doings, all he speaks, when he is excited, is poetical. Shakespeare puts the most of what he says into blank verse. Caliban only begins to lose his imaginative elements when he associates with Stephano and Trinculo, who would not have a poetical thought, if they could live for a thousand years. Even the little education which Prospero has given him has injured his imagination. Otherwise, when his senses are pleased, and when he hears the music Ariel is always making, his heart is stirred, his sense of beauty touched. Shakespeare does not leave this poor soul, cursed from his birth, without our pity. Trinculo trembles with fear when Ariel's pipe and tabor play. 'Be not afeard,' cries Caliban, and Prospero himself could scarce speak in better verse,

Be not afeard : the isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears ; and sometime voices,  
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,

Will make me sleep again : and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me ; that, when I wak'd,  
 I cried to dream again.

Thus 'music for a time doth change his nature.' One feels that he is capable of redemption ; but Stephano and Trinculo, deaf to sweet sounds, are in this life irredeemably the same. And before the close of the play, Caliban is on the way to conversion. He is far more intelligent than Stephano, who is more intelligent than Trinculo. Prospero has despaired of him, but Shakespeare does not. Even when he is drunk, he goes straight to his purpose of murder, and cares nothing for the shining garments which enrapture his companions. 'Let it alone, thou fool ; it is but trash.' And when he is punished, and Prospero forgives him, he cries ;

I'll be wise hereafter,  
 And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
 Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,  
 And worship this dull fool !

Critical of others and of himself, we see his intellect emerging. When he can argue thus, the part he plays in Renan's philosophic drama does not seem impossible.

When Caliban is drunk, he is no longer the brute. Curiously enough, one might argue that it was alcohol that opened his mind ; Bacchus the Emancipator has to do with him. When he is drunk for the first time, he ceases to be only brutish clay. The spark of soul in him begins to breathe and expand. Before alcohol paralyses, it stings the brain-cells, kindles the fire in the soul, opens ideal hopes, desires for abstract aims. In a savage like Caliban these would be wild and unformed, and if drunkenness deepened, would soon slip back into sensuality and cruelty. But while the first stimulus lasted, they would belong to the soul, and emerge in such imaginative pleasure as Caliban felt in the music of the

island. Then, being in a nature in which reason was undeveloped, they would further appear as whirling and shapeless desires, which, in the circumstances of Caliban, would be for liberty, such wild liberty as the uneducated revolutionist cries for. It is the first idea of Caliban when he is drunk, and what he says is strangely like the blind shouting of the mob, who know not what they affirm or what they deny :

'Ban, 'Ban, Ca—Caliban  
Has a new master—Get a new man.  
Freedom, high-day ! high-day, freedom ! freedom !  
high-day ! freedom !

Ariel also desires freedom, and it is interesting to compare his cry for it—the cry of a delicate spirit—with this drunken howl of Caliban. But howl or not, the conception of freedom means the possibility of progress.

We cannot pass over Stephano and Trinculo. They are the humorous reflection, on a lower level, of the King and the nobles ; of what Alonzo and his nobles might be, if they had been born as grooms and butlers. And their conspiracy to slay Prospero, and be kings of the island, is the ludicrous image of the conspiracy of Sebastian and Antonio to slay Alonzo, even of the conspiracy in the past which drove Prospero from his throne. That is Shakespeare, fanciful and fantastic, doubling of his plot ; his addition of a lining of gaiety to the cloke of seriousness.

Stephano and Trinculo are Shakespeare's last study of the drunkard. It is the habit to speak of them together, but Shakespeare took pains to differentiate them. They have quite distinct characters, though they belong to the same type. They are set into contrast with Caliban ; the savages of civilisation with the natural savage ; and Caliban is the better man. They are quite useless on the island ; the sweet sounds of it are nothing to them ; they do not understand Caliban when he is poetical. Caliban

becomes an idealiser when he is drunk; they lower everything, when they are drunk, to their own level. Caliban's mind develops under liquor; theirs is quite brutalised, save that they have not lost the gross, natural humour of their class. They are both amusing; and curiously enough, but, when one thinks of it, quite a piece of natural truth, Trinculo, the jester, when he is drunk, is not so entertaining as Stephano, the butler. Each, in drink, loses his conventional habit. Caliban, drunk, loses his fear of Prospero, and plans his master's murder with audacity, even with ability. Trinculo's fears redouble. Stephano is not afraid of anything, but his vulgarity of mind, when he is drunk, rises into its perfect consummation. It is almost ideal. His last speech in which—having been pinched and cramped, and hunted with dogs—his courage which endears him to us is still high and is heightened by the liquor in him, is inimitably invented by Shakespeare. He comes, in the stolen apparel, all bedraggled, before the fine company, and is not a bit ashamed or depressed. In his drunkenness, he is even for the first time intelligent.

Every man shift for all the rest, and let no man take care for himself; for all is but fortune.—Coragio! bully-monster, Coragio!

I take little interest in Antonio, Sebastian, Alonzo, and the rest. The scene where they first talk together on the island is the dullest in the play—so dull that I suspect that Shakespeare is here satirising the stupidity which passed for wit in court society. Even Gonzalo, the good lord, a variation of Polonius, is not a stirring personage. Shakespeare always mocks, with a certain gentleness, the old diplomatist, the counsellor who has grown into a fossil at the court. Gonzalo is good, but he has been made unintelligent by his own prudence. We forgive, however, his stupidity, because he has not lost his loving-kindness. Where he is intelligent, he is so by affection.

Antonio, having once conspired, is quite ready to conspire again, and leads Sebastian to the slaying of Alonzo; as in the past he has himself slain, as he supposes, Prospero. His nature, we see, has not been changed during all these years. He is a traitor in grain. Sin has multiplied from sin in him, and, when he is maddened by Ariel, his conscience does not awaken. It has been seared. What he feels is envy, hatred, and wrath. He draws his sword to slay. But Alonzo, who had helped Antonio to do the wrong to Prospero, now softened by the loss of his son, shaken by his shipwreck—himself no mocker, like Sebastian and Antonio, of goodness in Gonzalo—is awakened into repentance by the invisible voice of Ariel which recalls his guilt. Few words have better expressed the loud shout of conscience, roused to action after a long sleep, than his cry;

O, it is monstrous! monstrous!  
 Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;  
 The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,  
 That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd  
 The name of Prosper: it did hiss my trespass.  
 Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded; and  
 I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,  
 And with him there lie mudded.

So, he flies, distracted, over the island, with Sebastian and Antonio. They are maddened, and are still evil; he is maddened but repentant; and, because he is penitent, Prospero is comforting in the end to him, but stern as a judge to the others. Indeed, it was dramatically necessary that Alonzo should not be hardened in his guilt, otherwise there would not be easy room for his son to be betrothed to Prospero's daughter.

And now we come to the conclusion. Prospero, by his art, is almost supernatural, and has made the island, and all that occurs in it, supernatural. He is removed, in this



way, from common humanity. He acts like a divine Providence, moulding nature and human wills to his purposed end. That end, being good, makes his action good. But it would cease to be good, and all the previous action would be stained, if the thought of vengeance on the guilty which he has entertained so long should pass beyond the stern doing of justice into personal revenge; should bar forgiveness out of his heart. He would then fulfil no longer the part of Providence which embodies law, not the caprice of the passions. Therefore he forgives. And his humanity is secured. We know he will be a noble ruler when he returns to Milan, a man among men.

Irresponsible power, that terrible area of temptation, has not injured his character, and, in that, he is one of the noblest of Shakespeare's men. But he had great allies. His little daughter kept him human; his love for her, as she grew to womanhood, strengthened his humanity. Yet, he is still isolated from men by his all-potent art. He who can command at will the forces of nature, who can see the thoughts of men by Ariel who cleaves to them, is too divided from common humanity to enter into the world, and wisely play his part therein. He feels that himself. He is returning to live with his fellow-men. He will, therefore, be only a man. Therefore he makes the great renunciation; he abjures his magic. This is one of the wisest, one of the best imagined thoughts in Shakespeare. Goethe, in the *Faust*, was not capable of it. And the high nobility of the act makes Prospero's expression of it most noble in poetry;

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves ;  
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune and do fly him  
When he comes back ; you demi-puppets, that  
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,

Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you, whose pastime  
 Is to make midnight mushrooms ; that rejoice  
 To hear the solemn curfew ; by whose aid,—  
 Weak masters though ye be—I have bedimm'd  
 The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,  
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault  
 Set roaring war : to the dread-rattling thunder  
 Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak  
 With his own bolt : the strong-has'd promontory  
 Have I made shake ; and by the spurs pluck'd up  
 The pine and cedar : graves at my command  
 Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let them forth  
 By my so potent art. But this rough magic  
 I here abjure ; and, when I have requir'd  
 Some heavenly music,—which even now I do,—  
 To work mine end upon their senses that  
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
 I'll drown my book.

[*Solemn music*

And so, the enchantment is over. Ariel has regained his elemental freedom. Perhaps, he sleeps, every spring, in the cowslip's bell, or we may catch his eyes, in summer twilights, as the bats wheel by our seat under the trees. All the nymphs who danced on the yellow sands, all the goblins who pinched Caliban, have fled to their homes. The music, the sweet sounds, that filled the air of the island, are heard no more. The stormy sea that circled round the overhanging cliffs, rolls now over an empty space ; for the dim island, its haunted groves, its yellow sands, its pines that plumed the ridges above the moorland, are all sunk, with Prospero's book, deeper than plummet ever sounded. The isle came, enchanted, out of space ; it has returned, like Ariel, to the elements. All was illusion. Only humanity remains, housed in Milan and in Naples ; only love lasts, glowing in the heart of Miranda and Ferdinand. These also, in their time, departed, and only poetry is left—the eternal possession of the soul, now and in the world beyond—the true

enchantment; and the writer of it, the true Prospero, the true enchanter.

Indeed, it has been said that Shakespeare pictured himself as Prospero, and said farewell in this play to that dramatic poetry in which he had wrought so many enchantments, and seen, through Ariel, his familiar spirit of imagination whom he now set free, into the secret of Nature and the hearts of men. His magic staff he buried now, and deeper than ever plummet sounded, he drowned his book.<sup>1</sup> He had created a whole world, and now he would rest from creation.

The argument might be carried further. It might be said that Shakespeare, looking back on the work he had now laid aside, and on life's comedy and tragedy, expressed his judgment of it in what he said to Ferdinand and Miranda concerning the pageant he had shown them. All we think so vital, the glory, love, and suffering of the world, the cloud-capped philosophy and the solemn temples of law and religion, the earth itself, and all the human struggle on it, are illusion, the fitting in a dream of the Soul of the world, itself a dream, to and fro through empty space; and all its actors, like the spirits in the masque, phantoms in the dream, drawn out of the visionary imagination to make a show, and vanishing into the mist, to leave not a rack behind. It was thus, some theorist might say, that Shakespeare thought of all this world

<sup>1</sup> Many years ago, Émile Montégut elaborated this theory in a long and admirable article in, if I remember rightly, the *Revue des deux Mondes*. It was so well done that it almost convinced the reader, at least for a time, that it was a true theory. There can, however, be no certainty in any of these theories. They are interesting as excursions into the unknowable, but they remain guesses, and no more. One may, I think, argue from the general temper of a play to the temper of the writer's mind when he wrote it, especially when the same kind of temper, though in different moods, prevails through a succession of plays, as in the great tragedies. But Shakespeare was so impersonal in his art, that such argument has not much weight.

when he was near departure from it, and quote these famous lines :

These our actors,  
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
 Are melted into air, into thin air :  
 And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
 The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
 As dreams are made on, and our little life  
 Is rounded with a sleep.

This is a thought common to the race. It seems, so common is it, to belong to the original texture of humanity. In certain circumstances, varying as temperaments vary, it is sure to slip into the mind. Most often it slips out again: sometimes it stays; and it is one of the main thoughts of a religion held by many millions of men. Shakespeare was sure to have felt it moving in his mind, and to have known that it would move in the minds of many of his characters, in forms varying with the various characters. It is expressed again and again in the plays. It is here expressed in lines of such uncommon force and beauty that it ceases to seem common; it is as if no one felt it before Prospero shaped it. And it exactly fits the temper of his mind at this instant of the play; naturally emerging from the scene and the circumstances. But Prospero—and, indeed, Shakespeare, if we mix him up with Prospero—was far too sane and too experienced a character to imagine that life was illusion, or that we were the stuff of dreams, or that sleep rounded our little life. No one should quote the passage as an explanation of Shakespeare's theory of life, only as far as 'rounded with a sleep.' The rest is Prospero's (or Shakespeare's) indication that his picture of the story of humanity arose from the passing weakness of a vexed and weary brain.

The philosophy of illusion is the philosophy of tired people.

Sir, I am vex'd :  
Bear with my weakness ; my old brain is troubled.  
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity.  
If you be pleas'd, retire into my cell  
And there repose : a turn or two I'll walk,  
To still my beating mind.

After all, he need not have taken the trouble to explain to Ferdinand and Miranda that they were only alive in a dream. The lovers knew better.











